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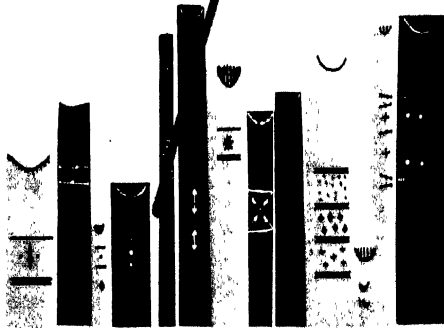
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Vol. 5, No. 1

The Invitation To Learning Reader

The Individual & Society

NOV 19 1957

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The Invitation To Learning Reader

The Individual & Society

Edited By
RALPH BACKLUND



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**THE INVITATION TO LEARNING READER
ON
SELECTED FAVORITE CLASSICS**

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CHARLES DICKENS

Oliver Twist

(As broadcast January 2, 1955)

EDGAR JOHNSON • GEORGE SHUSTER • LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: When a really great novelist writes a masterpiece, we generally take it for the delight it gives; we read it because of the wonderful story, the fascinating characters, and all the rest of it. But often the old man works his magic on us, and it's not until a long time afterward that we discover that he had a propaganda purpose buried deep but effectively in the story. I suppose that's true of *Oliver Twist* as much as of any book that Dickens ever wrote?

Johnson: The specific object of propaganda in *Oliver Twist* was an attack on the new Poor Law of 1834. It was designed to decrease the spread of pauperism in England, which had been proceeding at an alarming rate since 1795.

Bryson: Not, however, by raising the incomes of the paupers?

Johnson: Definitely not! According to the old Poor Law, paupers had received a certain dole, dependent upon the price of bread. The new law was designed to make pauperism unattractive by confining its victims in workhouses, and insuring that the living should be as sparse and unpleasant as it could possibly be made.

Shuster: The old Poor Law, with all its faults, was really part of "Merrie England"—the notion that you had a certain responsibility for the poor. What you couldn't forget, nevertheless, was the reformers who appeared at all stages. If, for example, we look at Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, we see something like the blissful old system and then are introduced to the reformer, who in this case is Malvolio. Perhaps your gentlemen of the reformed Poor Law were something like Malvolio.

Johnson: Yes, they were definitely the Malvolio type.

Bryson: In neither case did the authors think very much of the reformers!

Johnson: That's true. The reformers in this case were sparked in their philosophy by the Utilitarians, led by Jeremy Bentham and James Mill, and their intention was to see that pauperism was severely and stringently discouraged.

Shuster: You have a very interesting section on that in your book, Mr. Johnson. I wonder if you could recapitulate that for us?

Johnson: Yes. Dickens writes of the Poor Board: "The members of this board were very sage, deep, philosophical men, and when they came to turn their attention to the workhouse, they found out at once what ordinary folks would never have discovered: the poor people liked it. It was a regular place of public entertainment for the poorer classes, a tavern where there was nothing to pay, a public breakfast, dinner,

tea, and supper all the year around; a brick and mortar Elysium where it was all play and no work. 'Oho,' said the Board, looking very knowing, 'we're the fellows to set this to rights. We'll stop it all in no time.' So they established the rule that all the poor people should have the alternative—for they would compel nobody, not they—of being starved by a gradual process in the house or by a quick one out of it."

Shuster: These philosophical gentlemen that you speak of are the political economists, are they not?

Johnson: That's correct. Dickens always calls them "the philosophers."

Bryson: Not quite fair to the political economists, but possibly entirely just—as far as the working of that law of 1834 was concerned.

Shuster: It has often occurred to me that we should be extremely grateful for having Dickens, because without him we should undoubtedly have acquired Karl Marx.

Bryson: That's a dreadful thought, Mr. Shuster! Can you really make that convincing?

Shuster: I think so. This notion that there are implicit in society certain virtues, certain qualities of good and interest which you can develop for the benefit of society as a whole, has come to color English society and, I believe, our own. A curious thing about Dickens is that you never see him load the dice in favor of any one social theory. If, for example, you look at a character like Mrs. Bumble in *Oliver Twist*, you come to the conclusion that she's worse than her husband—the female of the species is deadlier than the male. But, then, you look at Sikes and Nancy, and Nancy is much better than Sikes. The country is not better than the city: most of the rascals in this story come from rural places; virtue is developed in the city as well.

Bryson: And economic forces are not all dominant. Sometimes character can work against them.

Shuster: Certainly! Environment is, of course, for Dickens a source of many woes, but he recognizes heredity as well.

Johnson: We get it again in the contrast between Oliver himself and Noah Claypole. If Dickens is saying in Noah Claypole that the product of the pauper work house often drifts into crime in the city slum, he's saying as clearly in *Oliver Twist* that he sometimes resisted.

Bryson: When he makes an attack as a definite propagandist, is that attack in any way blunted by the fact that he refuses himself to be doctrinaire? He's trying to hold a balance. How does he make a definite reformist movement so effective, so efficient?

Johnson: I think he does it by appealing to the human heart. Dickens is always insisting that there are depths and resources of kindness and generosity in the human spirit itself to which you can make a cogent and effective appeal. That's what he tries to do in *Oliver Twist*.

Shuster: I think, too, that in his approach to society there is something that has a little bit of the flavor of theology. We have the phrase, for example, "There but for the grace of God go I," which comes back to us again and again, even in *Oliver Twist*. There are forces which you can evoke by appealing to their powers of good. I think, for example, of the debt we owe to Dickens for just one thing:

the method of celebrating Christmas, and this notion that at least once a year we can all turn around and be kind and good to one another.

Bryson: Even sentimental!

Shuster: Perhaps too sentimental, as it may be, but we do color the world for at least a little while with his tints.

Johnson: That is exactly what Dickens says in *A Christmas Carol*, where the appeal to even such an old curmudgeon as Scrooge is made through the agencies of memory in the Ghost of Christmas Past, through realization of his exclusion from any warmth of human intercourse in the present in the Ghost of Christmas Present, and through fear of an even more bleak and desolate future with the approach of Christmas Yet to Come.

Bryson: After these frightening experiences that scare poor old Scrooge into being decent, he discovers warmth and happiness in meeting a family where kindness and generosity and sweetness are characteristic of the temper of their lives.

Shuster: Yes, I think it really extraordinary that there should have appeared in England at this time so great and effective a novelist with this point of view, and in the United States a poet who is in some respects akin to him, Walt Whitman.

Bryson: I'd like to nail down this point of view a little more exactly, if we can. You say it's the reformist rather than the revolutionary point of view, and the reformist view is based on the ultimate good in human nature. Does that make the revolutionist a cynic?

Shuster: No! The revolutionist in the sense that we have been using the word is . . .

Bryson: Well, you said Karl Marx.

Shuster: Karl Marx—let's be specific—is a man who takes refuge in a formula, in a crystallization, in a recipe which is going to have to be applied to all human beings, regardless. Because there really isn't, fundamentally speaking, anything in it with which you can appeal to people. You can talk only about their status, which is the fact that they belong to the proletariat or otherwise.

Johnson: Whereas Dickens is always insisting on the complexity of human nature, and on the complexity of its relations. He insists that people are infinitely varied and personal; although he doesn't fail to recognize the fact that they are colored and modified by their environment, the basic individual traits are always there to be depicted and appealed to.

Bryson: And didn't he, to use a bit of modern jargon, believe in process? He believed in education?

Johnson: Yes!

Bryson: He believed you could *do* something to people.

Shuster: As a matter of fact, he is a very great writer on the subject of education. It might even be possible to demonstrate that no other man has had so large a share in formulating what are to us normal educational concepts. For example, we all believe that students at every level require guidance. I think that Dickens is probably the first person in English to have made a strong plea for that.

Bryson: There again he put it so deep and so magically that most people get it without realizing what he's done to them.

Shuster: Yes, it's a sort of process of infiltration—or you might use the ugly word “subversion” in this case.

Johnson: You notice especially the school room scenes, to pin it down very specifically, in *Hard Times*, where Dickens is contrasting the absolute irrelevance of a purely factual and schematic approach to education with one which is based upon human nature itself.

Shuster: The other day I was talking to a young lady at my college about the fact that I was to appear on this program, and I said to her, “What do you remember about *Oliver Twist*?” And you can imagine what she said: “Please, sir, I want some more!” That phrase, which is the challenge of childhood to an outmoded and doctrinaire educational system, is the one which perhaps more than any other in the book remains vigorously implanted in people's memory. Now, I think that this really illustrates what I mean by a tendency to reform, to re-evoke from human nature as opposed to the tendency to impose on it.

Johnson: May I make a contrast here between the very ineffective education of the workhouse, as Dickens depicted it in *Oliver Twist*, and the very effective education of Fagin's Thieves' Kitchen in the same book, where Fagin does appeal to the interests of his young pupils in teaching them very efficiently how to be pickpockets and thieves?

Bryson: That gets us back to the first theme, because he did say, didn't he, that if you drove them out of the workhouse you drove them into crime?

Johnson: That's precisely the point of it. We have a whole series of scenes depicting the forces that push people out of the workhouse—hating the workhouse, hating the way in which they have been treated—and into the slums that Dickens so vividly depicts in Saffron Hill and Whitechapel, and Bethnal Green.

Bryson: Where the philosophers thought they'd die quicker?

Johnson: Precisely! Where the philosophers, in fact, didn't care if they were killed off, because in response to the doctrines of Utilitarianism they thought that it was necessary to “decrease the surplus population,” a phrase Dickens bitterly uses in *A Christmas Carol*.

Shuster: And it's very interesting to note that, as a matter of fact, some of the population *does* decrease, because the children who grew up under this horrible system—Oliver's little friend, for example—do die. Not Oliver, of course, and not the ones who perhaps have a little more of the survival of the fittest in them . . .

Bryson: A little more viciousness, perhaps.

Shuster: Yes; they go off to London and proceed to get themselves a thoroughly interesting form of higher education.

Bryson: But the person who's reading the book just for fun begins, at this point, to feel the drive of this tremendous theatrical, melodramatic power that Dickens has. These criminal characters are far more interesting than most of the good characters in the book.

Johnson: I'm afraid that's so. Mr. Brownlow has often seemed to me a thoroughly dull and uninspiring character, and I have often found it difficult to believe that he would succeed in thwarting the plots of even such a pasteboard villain as Monks. The real vivid heart of the book lies in that luridly lit scene of Fagin's dive, in the scenes

of shoplifting and of picking people's pockets, and in the scenes of vicious camaraderie with the Artful Dodger and the school of young pickpockets.

Shuster: You know, I have perhaps a little different approach to that aspect of the problem, although I . . .

Bryson: You're not denying Fagin's greatness as an educator, are you?

Shuster: I have certain doubts about it, which I'll not go into at the moment, but what Chesterton said about the book still seems to be very true. He compared it to one of the old medieval pictures in which you had a group of demons flying through the air, besieging the soul in a barred room. To me, one of the impressive things is the contrast between the environment into which Oliver comes and the world of evil that's outside. It's illuminated in that marvelous scene where the boy has been asleep and Monks shows up with Fagin; suddenly the child realizes that they'd been looking through the window at him. Cruikshank has a marvelous picture of it. There is something awfully appealing to me about the shelter that this little boy finds and, frankly, while I think that Mr. Brownlow probably would have been a bit dull, I have a warm spot in my heart for him anyway. I'd really love to meet him sometime.

Johnson: May I call attention here to the curious contrast between the atmosphere and the effect of *Pickwick Papers*, which immediately precedes it, and *Oliver Twist* itself? All of the atmosphere of *Pickwick Papers* is one of an open, sunlit landscape, whereas you have the feeling in *Oliver Twist* that everything is dark and oppressive. You have interiors like the bleak workhouse itself, the hot, fetid, greasy interior of Fagin's Thieves' Kitchen, the dark scenes of Nancy cowering on the steps of London Bridge—a tremendous series of dark and luridly lit scenes rather than outward, sunlit landscape.

Shuster: And the horrible rooms in which Sikes lives with Nancy, opening out into some dark alley through a little window near the roof, with practically no furniture in the place; everything is as bleak as the soul of Sikes.

Bryson: And there again—the balance in Dickens! After all, Nancy is tender to Oliver. She's not wholly evil. I suppose Fagin and Bill Sikes are wholly evil.

Shuster: I'm afraid there's little room left for us to doubt that in the case of either of these characters.

Bryson: And yet they somehow succeed in being what we call three-dimensional characters. They're not just types, they're not cardboard figures.

Shuster: Curiously enough, they are three-dimensional characters who always seem to me to walk and talk in one dimension.

Bryson: That's a paradox, Mr. Shuster!

Shuster: Yes, but probably due to the fact that every time they appear they use the same cue line and they never develop.

Johnson: You mean by that, of course, that they are shown always reiterating the same fundamental traits of character over and over again and, as it were, "naming their number" every time they speak. I think that's so, and yet I should insist on a fundamental realism and

even complexity of character in them anyhow. Even in Fagin, about whom you said a moment ago that he was wholly evil, it seems to me that there is a strange kind of hellish good nature and high spirits. He's not a bleak character at all.

Bryson: He couldn't have been so great an educator if he'd been so bleak.

Johnson: No! He has to appeal to the interests of his young pupils, and he does that.

Bryson: I'm kind of rubbing in the word "educator" because I'd like to have Mr. Shuster tell me why he was *not* a great educator. He had to make certain kinds of children into certain kinds of thieves, and he made wonderful ones of them.

Shuster: Well, as a matter of fact, he wasn't as successful at that game as he might have been. I think if he really and truly had been a pedagogue who knew something about his trade, he could have done a better job of it.

Bryson: Made them better thieves still?

Shuster: Better thieves! But quite apart from all that, he has only one motive to which to appeal, and this I think is the answer to your question. The motive is: "You may get hanged, but if you do—don't speak! You will thereby live up to a noble tradition, which has been established for you by one Fagin." This is his only code of ethics.

Bryson: But isn't it an extraordinary matter that he had any code of ethics at all? In order to be successful even in accomplishing this completely evil purpose, he had to appeal to a higher motive.

Shuster: Evil has to have a code of evil ethics.

Johnson: But Fagin doesn't care if they get hanged or not. His principle is that if they get hanged, providing he remains safe, he just cuts his losses and goes on to a new set of instruments.

Bryson: But as a pedagogue he knew that he couldn't make good thieves out of these children unless he somehow appealed to something in them that was above mere material gain.

Shuster: And he succeeds in that. The scene, for example, where the Artful Dodger appears before the court is a very interesting illustration of what can be accomplished in transferring to a pupil the kind of motivation which he had in mind.

Johnson: Incidentally, this thing had a curious parallel in Dickens' own life some ten years later when he and Mark Lemon were walking along a London street and caught a pickpocket, who, upon being haled into court, immediately accused Dickens of being one of the guilty ones and Mark Lemon of being his coadjutor. So that, farcical as the scene appears in the novel, it's exactly paralleled by an episode in fact.

Shuster: As a matter of course, his life was replete with what you can only call coincidences—remarkable things had happened to him in terms not merely of experience, but of the realization of experience.

Bryson: So Dickens' melodramatic flair was, in some sense, a reflection of what had happened to him? He lived a melodramatic life? The melodramatic world that he created was actually good reporting?

Shuster: Yes, I think that in that respect he resembles the novel-

ist who is most like him—Dostoevsky, who was forever reflecting his own unusual experiences in Russia. In Dickens you have always a very vivid awareness of his own life, which seems to me to give texture to so many of the novels.

Johnson: I think that comparison is very just. What strikes me as especially outstanding in both is the strange combination of realism on the surface, with a complete suffusion of that external factuality by the internal vision.

Bryson: Of course, it's characteristic of Dickens that his own very great skill as an actor—he *was* an actor, a great actor, almost as great an actor as he was a writer—must have given him a view of the world that had a certain lurid quality. He was so much, in the higher sense of the term, a *ham*. He saw everything in the most vivid colors.

Johnson: He assuredly did. In fact, when he gave dramatic readings in his later life from *Oliver Twist*, it was an habitual experience with him to have at least three or four ladies faint during the course of every performance.

Bryson: And he liked that?

Johnson: He enjoyed it very much. He kept a statistical record of it.

Shuster: These episodes are fascinating in that they show a man with all the gift of presentation, with all the intensity of the great ham, who longed for an opportunity to display his wares. And, of course, his books are to some extent transplanted or transformed theatrically.

Johnson: When Dickens was first rehearsing this scene of Sikes' murder of Nancy out on the lawn of his house, his son, reading indoors, thought at first that some actual tramp was murdering a woman out on the road and rushed out to rescue her.

Shuster: I want, if I may, to remind you of the presence in *Oliver Twist* of a very remarkable person, namely, Mr. Bumble, the beadle, who is a certain type of bureaucrat. You meet him in all countries and at all times; of course, he's also caricatured a little in order to permit the thesis to be carried forward.

Bryson: And he's always a concern of the real reformer, rather than the pseudo-reformer? I mean, he bothers the real reformer.

Shuster: He's the chap who gets in the way of reform. He's not altogether bad. Bumble is, as a matter of fact, rather a soft person in his soul.

Bryson: That's what a bureaucrat is: somebody who doesn't put his soul into his work.

Johnson: Yes. There's one scene in *Oliver Twist* where Mr. Bumble says to Oliver: "Don't cry into your gruel, Oliver. That's really very foolish." And Dickens adds bitterly: "It certainly was, because there was water enough in it already."

Bryson: But how can you justify, Mr. Johnson, your own paradox—that this novel is full of melodramatic theatricality, and yet at the same time it is realistic, its value as propaganda is based upon its accuracy in reporting? This is a rather astonishing combination, isn't it?

Johnson: It is a strange combination, but nevertheless I think it's true. The scenic and emotional effect is melodramatic, but all the details were exactly taken from Dickens' observations of London life

in the days when he was a reporter. He had actually worked among all of those slum streets. He had gone into those houses, he had seen the activities of thieves and attended the processes at police courts. He knew exactly what these things were like. There is a book called *Sixty Years of Waifdom*, written by an actual product of the thief-making system, that completely substantiates Dickens' account of Fagin's school.

Shuster: Another thing that keeps the book from being melodramatic is the fact that it is interpolated with editorial comments such as the one that Mr. Johnson reminded us of.

Bryson: Which don't stop the narrative?

Shuster: Don't stop the narrative, but point it up, keep it close to reality, never let it get entirely into the theatre. I think that many of these little editorial comments are among the memorable things of the book.

Johnson: There is a sharper note of satiric indignation, I think, in *Oliver Twist* than in almost any of the other novels. The editorial comment that Mr. Shuster speaks of is omnipresent in the book from the very beginning.

Bryson: But always with a freshness and a wit that keeps it from being just a little stagnant spot in the narrative.

Johnson: Yes!

Bryson: Well, I think I would go back to my first remark, that the old magician can write a wonderful book and we don't have to think about it as propaganda at all. It works, whether we think of it or not.

SPINOZA

Ethics

(As broadcast January 9, 1955)

MASON GROSS

•

STUART HAMPSHIRE

•

LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: When they published Spinoza's *Ethics*, after his death, it was not recognized by most of the people who read it as a book about ethics; in fact, they found it rather wicked, as well as an extremely difficult book. Perhaps that was because of the way he went at it.

Hampshire: Yes, I think it was because of the way he went at it. He begins with a study of metaphysics. That is to say, he sets out a complete metaphysical theory of the universe and of man's place in the universe, and deduces his ethics from that. But what, I think, was fundamentally shocking—and still is to some people, perhaps—is that man is regarded simply as one natural object among others; nothing, in Spinoza's view, can be said about how one should live and what is the best kind of life, except against the background of entire under-

standing of nature as a whole. So, one begins the *Ethics* with an account of the natural order of the totality of things, conceived as a single substance as God or nature. Now, this conception of nature as a whole, under this title of God or nature, entails the study of man himself as a natural object.

Bryson: And in the seventeenth century that was a truly shocking idea—that man could be studied as a natural object. Man was a sanctified, sacred, sacramental object.

Gross: I think that's true. But I think, also, that one of the shocking things was probably his use of the term "God" as an alternative to the term "nature." After all, it is perfectly proper to start a discussion of ethics, or of man's moral obligations, with a discussion of God, but not precisely this notion of God—where God and nature can be used as convertible terms, as if to say, "If you don't understand a proposition with the word 'God' in it, try to put in the word 'nature' in place of God and see how it reads."

Bryson: In Spinoza that's literally true. You can take a proposition—and they are propositions, they're stated as geometrical propositions—and you can remove the word "God" and put in the word "nature"; as far as Spinoza is concerned, he meant exactly the same thing.

Gross: Take the interesting proposition—Number 15, I think, in Part I—which reads: "Whatever is, is in God." I think, to most readers, that would not be a particularly easy statement to understand. But just reinterpret it: "What ever is, is in nature"—in other words, there's nothing supernatural here; everything is a part of the whole integral conception of nature—and you begin to see at least what he's driving at. It may be shocking, but it makes better sense. Would you agree?

Hampshire: I would agree, because the single unique substance, according to Spinoza, can only be one substance—and that, perhaps, is the most revolutionary part of his metaphysics. This single substance, God or nature, is self-creating. Therefore, there is no distinction between God, the Creator, and His creation. We must think of the whole natural order as perpetually self-creating, and nothing could conceivably fall outside this natural order. A human being is simply a particular part—that's the easiest way, I think, of putting it—a particular part of nature. Everything that can be said about human desires and what will constitute human happiness is deduced from the fact that man is a part of nature, and that there is no after-life to be distinguished from the natural order at all. This makes a direct assault on the main Christian tradition.

Bryson: Both these things would be shocking, of course, in any time: that God is not a person—is that right?—God is everything, God is nature . . .

Hampshire: Yes, that's true. Not a person.

Bryson: . . . Not a person; and that the person, in a sense, is not a person in the more ordinary Christian idea. That is, he's not a living soul that can persist after physical death in an immortality, and in that immortality more or less be compensated for his secular career.

Hampshire: Well, Spinoza has a curious secular equivalent of

immortality, which is extremely hard to explain but is integrally, absolutely, a part of his account of blessedness and of his *Ethics*—namely, that as we develop our minds and attain true understanding of the order of nature, we become progressively identified in our minds with that order; to that degree, insofar as we're entertaining thoughts about timeless truths, insofar as we have the kind of knowledge which we have in mathematics, and insofar as we're thereby detached from particular interest in particular things, we become in a sense immortal.

Gross: Wouldn't you say that the basis of Spinoza's ethical system is the thought that an individual, in a world where he's surrounded by forces that are always able to destroy him, can still win his own individuality, win his own freedom, or, if you like, become some kind of a positive constructive person?

Hampshire: Yes.

Bryson: Otherwise there's no ethics, is there?

Gross: No. It's how you win your freedom, as Spinoza puts it, how you overcome these bondages—particularly, of course, the bondage to the passions. The way in which you win your freedom is the whole story of the *Ethics*.

Hampshire: Yes, but then each individual—not only persons but everything else which can be called individual within the universe—attempts to persist in its own being, as far as it can, and to preserve itself. Now, in human beings this expresses itself by taking pleasure in certain things and being pained by certain other things. And insofar as they don't have the higher kind of knowledge, which it is Spinoza's purpose to open up to them, they are buffeted about by their passions, since they don't genuinely understand the causes of things around them or the causes of their own emotions. As soon as they do come to understand this, they become free in the only sense of the word which Spinoza allows. Now, he does explain how it is possible for persons to do this. He explains how people can build upon the elements of genuine knowledge which they have—as examples he always uses mathematical knowledge—and turn their minds away from interests in particular things; building upon this, they can make their thought self-directing, independent and, at any rate, relatively free. But I agree there is a problem as to what's meant by saying that they can "correct their understanding." This doesn't seem to be within the scope of Spinoza's determinism, as a matter that is within their power—though I'm not sure of that.

Gross: Well, isn't your word "power" the key? I think one of the sentences which always shocks the person who comes to Spinoza thinking of him as a conventional writer on the subject of ethics is his statement, "By virtue and power I understand the same thing." Somehow the notion of the conventional virtues all being reduced to this idea of power—which has a very positive meaning in Spinoza; he knows exactly what he's trying to say by it—is certainly not in line with conventional thinking.

Bryson: I think it's the more confused, at first reading, because of the fact that he attributes to every organism, even things that are not human, the determination to be itself. That's its chief virtue, to be itself; that's a sense of its power. It sounds at first reading as if

there were no ethical distinctions, that each form of energy in the world should go ahead and realize itself in any way that it can to its full extent. That means destructive forms of energy as well as, we should say, righteous forms of energy. One begins to get a little bit confused; one feels too much paradox. If self-realization is the greatest virtue and each thing in the world should try to realize itself, then everything has the same right to do whatever it does as everything else. I'm giving a preliminary, superficial reading. How does one get out of that paradox?

Gross: Well, I wouldn't try to get out just yet. I'd push it a little further and see what happens. Spinoza is quite clear about what he's saying. For example, he takes the central word—I suppose it is the central word in any ethical or moral theory—the word “good,” and he defines “good” as that which we certainly know to be useful to us. In other words, “good” is described as relative to this necessary urge to try to preserve our own being and increase our power to preserve it. By “bad” or “evil,” he means anything which is destructive of that. So that initially you have every man trying to preserve his power; increasing that power to the degree to which he increases his knowledge of the general principles of the world in which he lives and his own place in it; gradually becoming more intelligent, more powerful, better from that point of view; learning the secrets of the emotions and learning how to master them; and then, oddly enough, by one of those miraculous kinds of transformation, discovering that so far as he and the people around him can do that, to that degree they can get along and form a useful society.

Bryson: There's a mystery in the word “power,” though.

Hampshire: One increases one's power by increasing one's knowledge, if it's the right kind of knowledge. It has to be the right kind of knowledge. And the most important thing that he has to teach people is the distinction between different kinds or levels of knowledge; in a way, one could represent his whole ethics as dividable from his theory of knowledge. That is to say, only to the extent that one knows propositions which are necessarily true—which couldn't be false—does one have genuine knowledge. One builds on one's power—extends it—from the elements of knowledge which one possesses; one tries to build up methodically on these and accepts no knowledge which isn't genuine knowledge. Now, the effect of this is that one comes to understand the causes of one's own mistakes, and is no longer guided just by the influence of persons or things in one's environment. If you become to that degree wise, free, and self-determining, and others do likewise, the community would become non-competitive. But, he explains, it is very unlikely to happen under actual conditions, and so you need all sorts of laws and sanctions and penalties.

Bryson: Spinoza was a realist in politics, undoubtedly. But I'd like to put this to you gentlemen in the form of a rather crude actual example of self-realization, if I can take someone whom it's safe to call almost wholly evil. Let's take someone like Adolf Hitler. In the ordinary interpretation of these words—power, self-realization, and so on—Hitler realized himself by almost succeeding in destroying Europe. The last phase was failure, but suppose he *had* succeeded?

What would Spinoza do with a problem like that?

Gross: I think you're taking some of these terms, perhaps, in their conventional sense.

Bryson: I am. I want to know what is Spinoza's use of them.

Gross: Well, it seems to me that Hitler is an excellent example of the man who is most completely under the bondage of his passions, the man who never does know what he wants.

Bryson: He wasn't free.

Gross: He was the least free of all people. In other words, he had to rush from one inaccurate form of knowledge and one show of power to something else in order to escape the fact that he was hopelessly unfree; he didn't know how to control his own passions; he didn't know the real laws that determine human nature and the world in which he found himself; therefore, he got himself and all the rest of us into this perfectly horrible mess. According to Spinoza, the only way out of that is understanding, as Mr. Hampshire says, the basic principles—the real essence of nature and of God's power or God's will—in order that we may achieve our own freedom. That's the one thing that Hitler didn't understand; he sought every other kind of show of power or freedom, as against the real thing.

Hampshire: I think the nearest one can get to Spinoza's ideas of "free" is "self-directed." One is self-directed when the ideas which constitute one's mind follow each other in a necessary order; then one becomes, to that degree, identified with the natural order of things. It is, of course, a highly complicated metaphysical doctrine. But in terms of freedom as it is ordinarily understood in ethics and, to a certain degree, also in politics, this is a matter of being self-directed. One understands the causes of one's states of mind or one's conduct, and sees them—as he says—"under the guise of immortality." That is to say, one sees one's states as necessary features of the universe.

Bryson: I think what troubles the lay reader in a book like this is that he has to make this transition—a rather difficult one—from thinking that freedom means the indulgence of one's passions to Spinoza's idea that freedom means to get rid of one's passions, and to have emotions that are clarified by better understanding of one's self and one's place in the world. What he works toward is less and less fulfilment of his own desires by realizing the great desire of understanding his helplessness. The superficial thinker finds this a rather unsatisfactory definition of freedom.

Hampshire: Yes, but it has a certain parallel in some things that are said in modern psychology, for example. Spinoza has a theory that you convert what he calls passive emotions into active emotions by understanding the cause of your emotions. Now, this represents some parallel, some similarity—that, I'd agree, can't be pressed too far—with modern psychological methods. He does conceive persons very much as natural objects having power or force which can be rightly directed or wrongly directed.

Gross: I would like to quarrel with your phrase "recognition of one's helplessness."

Bryson: I was quoting, Mr. Gross.

Gross: I know. But I think we can overemphasize that side of

it. Of course, Spinoza wants to have man understand exactly what his position is in the world; he wants to have him completely understand that he cannot resist the forces that are around him. But the whole passage from inadequacy to virtue, to power, to knowledge or, ultimately, to placidness, is not in terms of helplessness. I mean that this isn't a meek and feeble man who says, "I'm just helpless, a poor miserable thing." This is a man who is constantly building his power and his confidence and his real joy and happiness. Joy is defined by him as the awareness of an increasing power to preserve your own existence. I think Spinoza must have felt that sense of joy, somehow or other, because he writes so eloquently about it.

Bryson: Although he was a man of very simple life, he was not ascetic. Right?

Gross: Oh no, he was not ascetic.

Bryson: When he said "get rid of your passions," he didn't mean to live a deprived life.

Gross: Neither deprived nor depraved; it's somewhere in between.

Hampshire: On the contrary, he very much disapproved of all the gloomier states of mind which have sometimes been represented as virtuous—such as pity, remorse, and the others.

Bryson: He didn't believe in pity, he didn't believe in remorse?

Hampshire: No. He says it's a sign of weakness and superstition and inadequate understanding that you should indulge in these emotions; if you understand the necessity of things, you can see that they couldn't have been otherwise. That's not the only reason why, but it's one of them. The wise man meditates on life, not on death, and he acts well and enjoys himself.

Bryson: And haven't you said that most of the ordinary moral crises don't exist for him anyhow? He thinks most moral judgments in the ordinary course of life are fairly unimportant.

Hampshire: Well, he regards conventional moral judgments as superstitious, since, on the whole, he supposes that they are not based on any real scientific knowledge of the nature of man and, therefore, they're subjective and not to be attended to. But this doesn't in the least mean that he thinks there is no difference between the free man and the slave, between the man who is wise and the man who is foolish. He has his own, as it were, scale of perfection—and "perfection" is a term which does survive in Spinoza, which replaces, if you like, the conventional morality. Then he proceeds to show that his own system of morality—which might be called "egotistical morality" since it rests on the assumption that all men do pursue their own salvation and, in a sense, their own pleasure—is nonetheless compatible with perfectly ordinary morality; in fact, more than compatible.

Gross: I think we have to realize that the essence of Spinoza's conception of blessedness, and of the way to it, is the same notion of the intellectual and contemplative life that Aristotle might have put forward. I don't think he is weighing this kind of pleasure against that kind of pleasure and trying to find his way through it. He finds the whole secret of man's life in his increasing intellectual comprehension of himself, of the world, and of God; and I think we must realize that, although Spinoza performs this curious trick of equating God

with nature, he thought he was drawing the logical conclusions from everything that had been said in the scholastic tradition, everything that had been said by Descartes and the new scientists. This is what these terms really mean. And it's this intellectual grasp of religious concepts, of moral concepts, of natural science, and so on, that is to him an overwhelming joy.

Bryson: You've both spoken of scientific knowledge and of his equation of wisdom with mathematics, to put it crudely. Is this the way in which Spinoza acts as a kind of bridge between scholasticism and modern science?

Hampshire: I don't think that, historically, he does act as a bridge. There were no followers in the eighteenth century who made the transition through Spinoza, because, as everybody knows, he was very much neglected for about a hundred years. I think he remains in a way an isolated thinker, in part because he stands, after all, in the Jewish tradition of thought, which parallels and overlaps the Christian tradition; also because, at a time when people weren't prepared for it, he suppressed the distinction between the Creator and creation.

Bryson: And, of course, the Jews rejected him.

Hampshire: Emphatically, yes; because he suppresses so completely the distinction between God and His works, and abolishes a transcendent God altogether. But this was precocious, outside its time, because it doesn't go with the ordinary atheistical attitudes or, indeed, with the ordinary atheistical arguments. And so the tone of the book, which is exceedingly grave, very rigorous, in no manner bright or disrespectful or consciously subversive, nonetheless is more profoundly subversive just because it's so grave and carefully argued. I think, therefore, that it was bound to shock people.

Gross: And I think one has to agree that because of the incredible integrity of this man—who would not compromise with any group for any reasons whatsoever, who would go off by himself, live by himself, and refuse any profitable modes of earning a living, who devoted himself completely to the analysis of these problems and the statement of them—his objectivity and his refusal to be dominated by any code whatsoever are perhaps the strongest bonds with society now.

Hampshire: I agree that the quality of his thought is, in the current sense, scientific and detached; but also there is a strong note of moral feeling about seeing and understanding the facts, which has occurred earlier in the history of thought. One finds it in Lucretius and elsewhere. You get a curious mixture of moral feeling with a scientific approach to human affairs and human problems and, indeed, to politics, which is highly modern in many ways.

Bryson: Words keep coming in here which have an ordinary meaning but which, one suspects, have a different meaning for Spinoza. You say he wanted to look at the facts, and yet isn't it true that he didn't mean here the kind of fact that one verifies with the senses?

Hampshire: Not in the least, no.

Bryson: Yet that's what we ordinarily call a fact.

Hampshire: Yes, I agree. Well, perhaps the word "fact" as I used it then is a little misleading. What I meant was that he regards

the acquisition of knowledge about the order of nature, provided it assumes a really solid logical form . . .

Bryson: . . . Through mathematics.

Hampshire: Well, not necessarily mathematics alone. I agree that his examples are mathematical, but some forms, for example, are mathematical physics or mathematics only insofar as it penetrates into every area of human knowledge.

Bryson: He believed that all thought eventually could be reduced to that rigorous logical form?

Hampshire: No, I don't think he did.

Bryson: But man can never really save himself?

Hampshire: Yes, he can—in this way: that he comes at the highest level of knowledge to see what the necessary features of the universe are and to understand the main principles which govern, for example, human society or human psychology. But Spinoza doesn't imply—in fact, he implies the reverse—that experimental or experimental knowledge are unnecessary; he shows in his letters and elsewhere that he allows a place for experiment. But you must always have in front of you this abstract framework into which all your experimental knowledge is to fit, and you must have this vision of the whole structure of your knowledge towards which you're working.

Gross: And yet, I think we mustn't altogether deny this connection with facts in the sense in which you used them, Mr. Bryson. For example, if you read his analyses of some of the emotions like hate, love, pity, humility, repentance, pride, or whatever it may be, they're astonishingly revealing. I think at first you wonder why he does it that particular way; then you trace his thinking back and see why he had to come to that conclusion, why the logic of his whole development forced him there, and you suddenly discover yourself looking at these particular emotions in an entirely different light. I don't think we ought to convey the impression that pure reason necessarily has no relevance to human experience.

Hampshire: His political observations, particularly in the *Treatise on Politics*, his advocacy of a higher criticism of the Bible, his remarks about censorship, his remarks about the nature of laws, about sumptuary laws and what kind of prohibitions are worth having and are sensible and reasonable—all these show, apart from the known facts about him, that he was exceedingly immersed in the politics of his time. He was one of the earliest advocates of tolerance and free speech.

Bryson: And in a political sense, at any rate, he was a realist. He said, "This is the way things are."

Hampshire: Absolutely. And that is what he's constantly saying: you have to take human nature as it is and know what it is before you start telling people how to behave. It's hopeless to make more injunctions without studying the nature of man.

Bryson: Of course, it may be that he seemed "wicked" at the time because he was setting an ideal of human behavior so far beyond the grasp of almost everybody.

Gross: The political realism that you talked about caused his house to be stoned, if I remember right—at least that's the legend. But this man is incredible, really. Here is a book which, at the start,

is perhaps the most difficult you could read; but with effort, I think, it becomes the most rewarding—something that you come away from every time with some fresh insight, some fresh stimulus: it's a source of absolutely unending reward, it seems to me.

Bryson: I suppose one doesn't have to be a profound philosopher to know that the path of righteousness is going to be a steep and difficult one, any way you take it.

MARK TWAIN

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

(As broadcast January 16, 1955)

LIONEL TRILLING

• RAY B. WEST, JR.

• LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: I don't know what one does with a man who throughout his life carefully cultivated the reputation of being a humorist, and at the same time wrote books of the greatest depth and poetry and feeling and innate tragedy that anybody in our literature has ever done. How does he manage to be one of the most popular writers we've ever had?

Trilling: What one does with him, I don't know—except sit down and adore and worship him—but that he is one of the most popular writers that we have ever had is certainly true. One might say of *Huckleberry Finn* that it is totally available to a man all through his life. It's a book that one can read at the age of ten or even at eight; one can read and re-read it from that time on, and always find something new in it.

Bryson: Do you expect to be still reading it at eighty?

Trilling: If I live to be eighty, there is no book I would more expect to be reading. As I look back over the books that have had an influence on my life, I should say that this book above all others has meant most to me.

West: Yes, I thoroughly agree! As I was reading the book this time, the memory of my first experience came back to me—my admiration for Huck, and the terror of the situations that he found himself in.

Bryson: You were young, too?

West: I was very young.

Trilling: But was your dominant feeling one of *terror* as you read it?

West: No, I don't think that was dominant; but my memory is of the scene at the beginning of the book, where Huck goes back to his father and is locked up in the cabin while the father is gone, and the father comes back and threatens him. I remember this as a horrifying experience to a very young reader.

Bryson: Was it the father relationship that frightened you?

West: I think not, although that might have had something to do with it.

Bryson: The reason I ask is because it seems to me that most of the terror a very young reader feels is the delicious kind that you look for in your reading when you're very young. The father motive is a little different. That's a little more genuinely frightening.

Trilling: It is truly frightening; and now that you speak of it, I recall that it was frightening and almost incomprehensible to me. Of course, it's very central to the book. This boy, who had so dreadful a father, had no feeling at all for him: he was quite alienated from him.

West: I think there is a conventional relationship with the father that he pays some attention to.

Bryson: But is that part of the conventional system of morality, represented in this book by the village, that Huck is trying to run away from?

West: Oh, very definitely!

Bryson: It isn't only his father, a terrible creature who might hurt him, but the convention that he's got to love a man who is thoroughly unlovable?

West: Yes, and I think there's the whole problem of authority here, too. The father is the principal authority in convention, but we also get the authority of all of the influences in the village. I think this carries over to the river, when they run into the river pirates and the wrecked steamship, or when they get lost in the storm.

Bryson: Let's go back and identify this day. What does Mark Twain do here to give you this story of a boy's escape from conventional, spiritual and material bondage?

West: I think as far as the boy reader is concerned—if we're talking about him—that he senses that these are the kind of fears he actually knows or is capable of knowing in imagination. Authority is something very close to a boy.

Trilling: Of course, the element of fear that lies in the book goes well beyond social or parental authority, doesn't it? It's a book crowded, for example, with fear of spirits.

Bryson: It's a book of adventure!

Trilling: Well, it's a book of adventure, but even before that it's a book in which the evil spirits play a very important part. People were superstitious then—the slaves were perhaps especially so, but so were their masters—and one could make a list of the things that were taboo, the things you mustn't do: you mustn't shake a tablecloth out after sunset, you mustn't spill salt, you mustn't look over your left shoulder at the new moon—things of that kind. Huck believes these things and is certain that signs and portents are quite real, so that fears are indigenous in the whole structure of the universe.

West: I would say that there are three sources, finally, of real authority. One is the authority of the convention, represented by father and the other villagers that Huck has been in relationship with. Then there is the kind of authority which comes from nature, the authority and respect that's paid to the river itself and to knowledge of the river. And, finally, there is a kind of supernatural authority which we get with the Negro, Jim. He is the one who understands this law;

Huck takes him as his mentor in understanding the authority of the supernatural.

Trilling: One would want, I think, to mention one other kind of authority that carries weight with Huck—since you speak of his relation to Jim—and that is the authority of affection. Huck's father is totally contemptible and totally to be feared and Huck, as I say, has no real relation to him; but we can think of Jim, without forcing the point too much, as a surrogate father, as the mild and gentle and protecting father who rules morally by the force of his goodness and affection.

Bryson: And that's the one authority that Huck Finn doesn't run away from, isn't it?

Trilling: That is the one authority that he's totally devoted to and, as it were, incorporates in himself.

Bryson: Yes. Now, there is this hot and sleepy village, infected with all the difficulties of ancient conventionality and superstition and ignorance and poverty and the shadow of slavery, and there's the river outside. How does Huck get onto the river? Because that's his escape, isn't it?

West: Yes, it is. It's presented as an escape, but I think of it, finally, rather as a quest than an escape.

Bryson: What's he seeking?

West: I think he's seeking a life, and the river is one means of providing that. That is to say, he's examining all of these various authorities that we've been talking about, and he's testing the affections of the Widow Douglas, of the Negro Jim, and of the Phelps. We could mention, too, all of the less desirable characters that he meets along the way. Each experience is, it seems to me, a kind of testing of his relationship to that person.

Bryson: But when Jim, the runaway slave, and Huck Finn, the runaway boy, get on the raft and start down the river, did Huck—who, after all, tells us the story—know that he was on a quest, or did he just think he was making an escape?

West: Oh, Huck never knew that he was on a quest. It seems to me that on the level at which we first began talking about the book, it would be unfair to talk about this as a quest.

Bryson: But it dawns on him as he goes?

West: True! He thinks that he's escaping the village, I suppose.

Trilling: Don't you think it's more than the village that he's escaping? It's almost—and I think that this constitutes a terribly important appeal to the boy who reads it; I don't know if girls love this book; I think some women do. Whether girls read it or not, I don't know . . .

West: My daughters read it very early, Mr. Trilling.

Trilling: And loved it, did they?

West: Very much.

Trilling: Well, the appeal to a boy, perhaps to a girl, is what Huck manages to accomplish, and that is to escape not merely from the authority of the village, but from all domination and to be quite by himself and to be, you might almost say, free of an identity. One of the things that interests me so much in this book is the many stories

Huck tells of his past circumstances. He never meets somebody to whom he has to lie—and he always lies about his situation—but that he doesn't think up some new story of how he happened to be here, so that you might say he's running away from any kind of fixity to a familiar existence.

Bryson: Running away from himself, as well as everybody else?

Trilling: In a sense running away from himself—from any assigned self, that is.

Bryson: The river is just too big. He can't really fix himself on the bosom of that immense flood.

Trilling: Yes, I think that's quite true. If it doesn't sound too extravagant, you almost feel that he's making an effort toward an identification with the river in negating his existence. Because he does negate it at all times.

West: And yet one finds that he is forced to the land, and whenever he is he meets a new experience.

Trilling: Always a bitter experience!

West: Yes, I think so; sometimes a poignant experience, sometimes a humorous experience—or, at least, one that's presented very humorously—but always a disillusioning experience.

Trilling: Could you not say, speaking of the charm this has for a child, that whenever Huck touches civilization he runs into trouble, he's in some kind of danger, but as soon as he is back on the raft peace begins to descend on him again? And while life is sometimes dangerous, because the river is dangerous . . .

West: Oh, he likes the danger!

Trilling: He likes the danger, but when he is in that natural situation he is happy. Whenever he is in a social situation he is miserable and troubled.

West: This, it seems to me, is the way a child dreams.

Trilling: Exactly. I was just going to say that there is a kind of common sense about Huck that I think is true of most children. They look with a very skeptical eye at many of the conventions of adults, just as Huck looks at them. They accept some of them but can't quite understand them, or—as in the case of Huck's relationship to Jim—they might try to explain them to someone who understands them even less.

Bryson: But when your reader grows up a bit, doesn't he find that Huck *didn't* completely run away from civilization and all its evils? After all, there was a runaway slave with him on the raft.

West: Yes, and that creates a moral situation, which seems to me to be one of the classic ones of literature. I don't know of any moral situation that is more poignant than that in which Huck finds himself, because he is a very conventional person in any number of ways and he accepts conventional morality on one level.

Bryson: If he had been able to stay in the village and ignore it, he'd have been all right.

Trilling: But there he was, completely accepting the rightness of slavery. The idea that he should be helping a slave to run away doesn't merely present itself to him as a danger or an illegal thing to do—it represents itself to him as *immoral*; and, while he loves Jim, his love

is tortured by the fact that he is doing something that not only society frowns on, but that religion and his own conscience frown on. His conscience tells him that he's doing wrong, and when he makes the great decision to do it anyway and, as he says, to be damned; I think we get a very great moment in literature.

Bryson: He admits damnation because he's going to stick by his friend.

Trilling: This is one of the greatest ironies, I think, that has ever been conceived.

West: The irony is that his conscience tells him to do the thing that he can't finally bring himself to do.

Bryson: To turn Jim in. He says "I'm damned rather than that."

West: The book used to be banned in libraries—I think T. S. Eliot says in his essay on *Huckleberry Finn* that his mother forbade him to read it because it was a book about a bad boy.

Bryson: Well, Mr. Eliot lived on the Mississippi, and his mother might have felt that he'd take to the raft if he read the book.

West: Possibly—it seems a bit fantastic. But it was like smoking, it was the wrong thing to do; and this boy smokes . . .

Trilling: . . . And swears!

West: . . . And lies!

Trilling: And associates with low people!

West: He's not a model child, this is very clear, and school superintendents and librarians used to ban the book as being subversive of the right bringing up of children.

Bryson: Oh, yes, I'm sure they did!

Trilling: It's one of the most liberating books a boy can read, because he knows that Mark Twain is totally on his side. But it seems to me that in an odd way these people were right, because it is a very subversive book. It seems to me that it is subversive of conventional morality wherever we find it. When a boy starts to reflect that *Huckleberry Finn* speaks of his conscience as telling him to inform on Jim and return him to slavery, and that he believes that this local morality is total and transcendent and applies at all times in all places—once a boy has understood that, he never again can accept the final authority of conventional morality.

West: One can even say of the language that while we admire it now, it's not the thing that the conventional mother or school teacher would suggest that a child emulate.

Bryson: I think a word on that language is called for. After all, you have a few characters here, and you have the tremendous river which Mark Twain can describe as few people have ever described any phenomenon of nature; but you also have a style, and it's a style insidiously seductive and relaxed and elusive. What's the secret of this style?

West: I happen to come from the west and it seems to me that this is in a sense a western boy's speech; in other respects it's a mixture of the west and the south. The book actually is set right at the crossroads of America, particularly at that time: this is the dividing line—at Hannibal, Missouri—between the north and the south, and

the Mississippi, I suppose, generally is thought of as the dividing line between the east and the west.

Bryson: Between the north and the south?

West: Yes, I said the north and the south, but I do think that it is essentially a western book in its attitude. That is to say, the whole attitude of the book reflects the freedom that the west seemed to present to the nineteenth century, and that we still think of it as presenting.

Trilling: Among other things, wouldn't you say, a linguistic freedom?

West: Yes, that certainly is one thing. And the kind of irony we find—because it is a humorous style, it *is* ironic—was the kind of language that Clemens cultivated on the lecture platform. We have descriptions of his lectures in which he stood up and pretended to be the man who was lecturing—that is, Mark Twain. This became a kind of mask which he put on, just as in this book it becomes the language of Huckleberry Finn or the language of the Duke and the Dauphin.

Bryson: But it's masked in the sense of a *persona*. It's a mask which stands for a character that he wants to be. It's not to hide something—it's to focus something, isn't it?

West: It's not really to hide something, except that I see this little notice at the beginning of the book: "Persons attempting to find a motive or a moral in this novel will be shot." I think this is Mark Twain speaking. It's not Samuel Clemens who, after all, lived a rather conventional life in New England in his later days. But as Mark Twain he was a rebel from the beginning, and I think he understood Huck so well because he was the same kind of rebel that Huck was.

Bryson: Even to the point of having had his own river adventures.

West: Yes, as a pilot on the river. But the language he adopted—and by the way, there was a whole school of American humorists who taught Mark Twain this particular style—did not always say what he intended to say. That is, he was hiding, I think, the moral. Not that it can't be discovered and shouldn't be, but that we discover it with a kind of added pleasure.

Trilling: There's always a certain dead-pan quality.

West: Yes, exactly.

Trilling: Of course, the element of irony is important in the moral import of the style. But one other thing that interests me is the esthetic appearance of the style, the fluency of it, the immediacy of it, the apparent relaxation of it. It isn't actually as relaxed as it seems, but it gives the immediate effect of relaxation,

West: Hemingway speaks of this book as being the source of all good American style. That may be an extravagant statement, and yet I think that almost anybody who knows the book, and who writes or thinks about writing, thinks of the "norm" of American style as arising from this book.

Trilling: Yes!

West: In a sense, I suppose that's what style should do. It should be relaxed, and yet we know that it probably cost a good deal of effort.

We know that Mark Twain was not always as successful as he was with *Huckleberry Finn*.

Bryson: Getting back to this story, you have the boy running away and going down the river with the runaway slave and deciding to risk his own damnation rather than give the slave up. But he does get back to the village in the end, doesn't he? That ending has been much criticized. Did he get recaptured, really, by conventionality and the Widow Douglas? Do you have the feeling that he ever really escapes, or is this a tragedy, after all, underneath its tremendous and robustious humor?

Trilling: Well, he says—the famous phrase—he “wasn't going to be civilized any more, he'd been there before”; and now he was going to light out for the Indian territory, I think, and be free again.

Bryson: He says?

Trilling: This is what he says, and it has always been interesting to me that the boy upon whom Mark Twain is said to have based the character of Huckleberry Finn did actually go to the west, did light out for a territory, and when he got there he became a very respectable citizen and a judge. It seems to me that in a certain sense this is what Huckleberry Finn's fate is going to be, because he is terribly involved in civilization.

Bryson: That's the American epic!

Trilling: His sense of morality is of a peculiar exquisiteness that is bound to involve him with people at every point. As he moves along the river, as he moves through life, one finds him touching people's lives everywhere—and always with an intention to help. This is the most helpful little boy, the most involved little boy, who ever existed. He comes like a spirit of good into the lives of any number of people, even the people who most harm him, who have in their minds to use him. But the humility that he has, his sweetness and modesty of character, lead him to forgive at once. It's quite astonishing and I'm sure it's an extreme thing to say, but this is almost a saintly quality.

Bryson: It is a saintly quality, because there's a complete innocence, innocence even of conventionality, which makes his saintliness so much more effective. But nearly all the people he helps are despicable.

Trilling: Oh, indeed, they are! There never was such a rogues' gallery.

Bryson: Mark Twain doesn't seem to have liked anybody in this book, not even Tom Sawyer, except Huck Finn and the Negro, Jim.

Trilling: I think you're quite right. Tom Sawyer, who was one aspect of Mark Twain, is treated in a very contemptuous way.

West: Yes! As a matter of fact, don't you think that it's easier to understand Huck simply because we have Tom Sawyer as a foil? You remember that the novel begins with the little incidents, the romantic incidents, where Tom invents a situation that couldn't possibly exist. I'm thinking of the scene where they are supposed to capture a train of elephants and camels and all the exotic figures of Tom's imagination, which came from his reading of the kind of romantic literature that Mark Twain didn't like, and Huck is disgusted when

he finds out that it's nothing but a Sunday school picnic that they're raiding.

Trilling: Yes!

West: But he does carry with him all the way down the river a knowledge that, whatever might happen, if Tom Sawyer were only there it would happen a little more elegantly. And then we have the wonderful scene—to me a wonderful scene—at the end of the novel, where they are going through the elaborate process of freeing Jim, using all of the devices of medieval romance and the romantic French novel, and Huck thinks it's rather foolish. But he says "It is elegant," and it *is* an elegant escape. We feel that the last thing Huck had to see through was this romanticism that Tom represented. I think we can really say that Mark Twain thought of village life as being romanticized, in the sense that it was not true life; it was the common-sense attitude which saw through this romantic framework and understood what the true meaning of each experience was. Huck was attempting to find this in each of his experiences, and we understand because he has Tom as a foil to play against. We understand just how Huckleberry Finn can see through the false elegance and the pretense of so much of life.

Bryson: Also, Huck Finn rejected Tom's escape from the conventionality of the village, the romantic escape. He wouldn't have that.

West: Tom is a kind of conventional artistic rebel, isn't he? I mean that he rebels in conventional terms.

Bryson: That's right! He's not enough of a rebel to suit Huck Finn.

West: And not a rebel in the same sense that Huck is, since he does at least accept this attitude toward life.

Trilling: Of course, we have to be very careful about speaking of Huck as a rebel because he never is conscious of rebellion. He's simply conscious of what one might call disgust, or the necessity to withdraw from an unhappy spectacle. We have to ask, of course, where he derived his own moral sensibility, because he's always judging.

Bryson: Out of innocence! Isn't that what Mark Twain is saying?

Trilling: We have to be a little careful of that. That's certainly a very romantic notion, if we're going to use the word "romantic" in the pejorative sense. In part he derives it from religion, from the life of the village, from the best aspects of his society that he has been able to abstract.

Bryson: And, of course, Mark Twain is partly laughing at himself in Tom Sawyer's kind of escape from convention.

Trilling: Oh, yes! Of course!

West: This is one very important side of Mark Twain. Can't we say that what Huckleberry Finn was rebelling against was the appearance, not the reality—that he was attempting to find the reality?

Bryson: Not only can we say that; we can also say that to go with him on this rebellion is always worth doing, any number of times, over and over again.

MARCEL PROUST

Remembrance of Things Past

(As broadcast January 23, 1955)

MILTON HINDUS

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JUSTIN O'BRIEN

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LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: The work of Proust is a kind of landscape, a very vast and complicated landscape. Before you can even start thinking about it you have to get an overall view of it. It's generally thought of as a picture of society in decay. At least, that's what people accuse Proust of having done with the society of his own time.

O'Brien: It is thought of that way, and there is justification for that view. It is a society in decay, and one which Proust saw very intimately from the inside.

Bryson: Proust is often accused of having rather enjoyed the pictures he painted of the decay itself.

O'Brien: I think he did, but he also felt that he was being very, very true to the facts as he knew them. While he was depicting the decay of certain elements in that society, he was also depicting the rise of other elements such as he himself, a middle-class young man who entered the highest and most exclusive groups in France.

Hindus: My own feeling is that Proust is not really interested in showing a society in decay. As a matter of fact, there was a study some years ago by a scholar named John Spagnoli which attempted to show that Proust's social scene owed more to Balzac—that is, to his reading of Balzac—than it did to contemporary society in France.

Bryson: You mean that he was painting an imaginary or a literary France instead of a real one?

Hindus: That's right. He was an invalid for many years of his life, and writing was an amusement for him. It interested him, it kept him occupied. I don't mean that he didn't use elements in contemporary society as part of it, but I think, on the whole, that he wasn't an historian. He was something else. One critic put it this way once: "Society was for Proust what the ballet stage was for Degas, an opportunity to express himself as an artist."

O'Brien: It was most certainly such an opportunity, but his illness, which he constantly used to protect himself against social duties and to allow himself enough time for writing, was something that allowed him to stand off from and view society with a certain perspective, so that he wouldn't be writing directly in the middle of it.

Bryson: Of course, he has been called a great comic writer, in the Aristotelian sense, and the comic writer is one who makes men a little less than they are instead of a little greater than they are. Some people have thought of the whole of *Remembrance of Things Past* as one bad caricature of French society in, say, the first half of the twentieth century.

O'Brien: Although I think there's justification for that view, I

feel that perhaps it's a little exaggerated; the society Proust depicted was not precisely society as it existed during those years. He ignored certain elements in social life—did it quite deliberately. He limits himself to the upper bourgeoisie or the nobility—which was a limited section of the world at that time—and the servant class. We don't get any people in between.

Hindus: My feeling is that Proust shows us a society which has universal elements rather than particular ones. That is, the kind of changes that take place in the pages of Proust are changes which he implies are going on all the time, and have gone on all the time in the past. For example, the interpenetration of the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy. Now, most social-minded and Marxist critics have made much of that as proving that Proust was interested in showing the degeneration of French aristocratic society. To me it has an altogether different meaning. Proust saw that this interpenetration had been going on, actually, for a very long time. He mentions periods hundreds of years ago, long before the French Revolution, in which the same thing took place, and says that it would go on for an indefinite time in the future. In one place he speaks of the countless Princesses de Guermantes who are to come, showing clearly that he expected the fabric of the society he was describing to endure. In fact, he didn't have the temperament of the social historian at all. My feeling is that the deepest thing Proust said about society—and the image is his own—is that it's like a kaleidoscope. It continually shifts its pattern. The groups who dominate it keep changing, but it doesn't have any meaningful progression—unlike the distinguishing Marxist idea, which is that society is going somewhere. For Proust it is not going somewhere. It changes all the time and people who weren't there a year ago, or ten years ago, are there now—but really it doesn't matter, because these people in turn will yield to others.

O'Brien: Quite right, and that's why Proust takes such delight in depicting little closed groups like the Verdurins on the one hand, or the Guermantes on the other.

Bryson: The Verdurin group are the rich, up-coming, strong, self-willed bourgeoisie?

O'Brien: Yes!

Bryson: And the Guermantes are the old, decaying aristocracy?

O'Brien: Yes, precisely! The young man who is the narrator, and the hero of the work, first sees both of these groups from the outside. He romanticizes them in his own mind. The very name Guermantes and the very words connected with high society form an image of inaccessibility and of beauty and of glory; the very names of the Verdurin family, of the painters that they have discovered and the musicians that they have patronized and brought forth, all mean something very significant to the young man.

Bryson: That's for a double reason, isn't it, and one of them is that he's young?

O'Brien: Yes!

Bryson: And the other is that he's the son of respectable but not aristocratic parents. He's partly Jewish, and that's part of the story?

O'Brien: Yes!

Bryson: And he feels that even when he grows up he may never be able to penetrate those groups?

O'Brien: Exactly. And one picture that he gives is of the young boy in Combray, in the little town where he spends his vacations, being very unhappy because his mother can't come up and kiss him good-night. His mother can't come because she's sitting down in the garden with a certain Monsieur Swann. He is another rich middle-class man who has access to some of the worlds that the young boy has dreamt about.

Bryson: Swann has actually got into these worlds.

O'Brien: He belongs in both of them, as a matter of fact, as we learn as the book progresses; but the boy never suspects that this man sitting down in the garden, who is now a horrible bogeyman to him because he's keeping Mother from coming upstairs, is the man who eventually is going to introduce him to both of these worlds.

Hindus: Isn't it true that Proust is the young man at all times and in all places who romanticizes the world in his imagination? Then, gradually, this romantic covering is stripped away for him by experience, and he becomes habituated to the circles that he had only dreamt about in the past.

Bryson: Not only the ordinary experience of growing up; he sees these strong and vigorous and cultivated bourgeois families, he sees the beautiful and delicate and decayed aristocratic families—I'm making it a bit crude—and then as he grows up he finds that, after all, romance isn't anywhere. Is that the ordinary adult experience, or is Proust after something deeper?

Hindus: I would think that it's the ordinary experience, which can be translated into the experience of the individual reader with different terminology. In America we don't have the same class structure that he describes here. Nevertheless, in every society, including our own, there are circles that appear to be closed, but gradually they open and they are discovered to be from the inside quite different from what they had seemed on the outside.

O'Brien: I agree with that—it is the ordinary experience—and yet it may be somewhat intensified in Proust's case because he is an artist.

Bryson: Now you're indicating this is autobiographical, aren't you? It's always difficult to separate Proust's life from Proust's story.

O'Brien: Very difficult!

Bryson: Because it is the story of his life, in a sense?

O'Brien: In a very intimate sense it is the story of his life, and yet it is transposed so carefully that he keeps his own name out of the book. But the hero-narrator shares so many experiences with the author that we tend to confuse them all the time.

Hindus: But isn't it true that they also differ in very important respects? For example, the narrator in the book is not Jewish, or partly Jewish, as Proust was. And the narrator in the book is not homosexual, as Proust in life was. Isn't that true?

O'Brien: Yes, that is true.

Bryson: Both those things are not in the hero but they *are* in the story, as part of the material.

Hindus: Homosexuality, as it's drawn, is an inescapable subject in Proust: we have to discuss it. To him it's not an element of decay in society—it's been present all the time, as he continually shows us, from the earliest history down to the latest, from Alexander of Macedon down to Wilhelm II of Prussia. As a matter of fact, Proust in many ways anticipates Kinsey on the subject; the statistics that he gives closely agree with those of the sociologists.

O'Brien: I think perhaps what Mr. Bryson meant was that Proust has fragmented himself, and that even though he does not give to his hero certain of his own aspects—such as his Jewish background and his homosexuality—he does give them to other characters in the book. We have a Bloch, for instance, who is entirely Jewish, and Charlus and Saint-Loup and so many of the other characters who take on the aspects of homosexuality.

Bryson: And, of course, the reasons why one reads a book like this, the reasons why people have said that it's the greatest modern novel—or even gone beyond that, the greatest of all novels—are not at all explained by this sociological aspect of it, are they?

O'Brien: No, indeed!

Bryson: Although I bow to a superior knowledge of French literature, it is rather interesting that the two greatest French novelists, Balzac and Proust, both wrote about a society in turmoil, societies in which there was a great deal of shift and change. Maybe that's what a novelist has to have as material; but it isn't just the sociological part of it, not even primarily that.

O'Brien: No. I think that is perhaps *not* what most captivates people in Proust. It's one thing that they cannot be unaware of. But, after all, almost the first thing that most of us encounter when we start reading Proust is his peculiar conception of time—the fact that his hero is apparently a middle-aged man, waking up in bed and not knowing precisely where he is, an experience which gives him an opportunity to go back and think of all the beds he's ever slept in from childhood on, all the places he's ever lived, in a kind of dream-like confusion. Everything gets amalgamated, so that we have shifts in time from the present to the past and then to some intermediate period between. Consequently, it's a most upsetting novel, an introduction to a new attitude toward time.

Bryson: It isn't really a story at all, is it, in the ordinary sense? I mean one having a beginning and a middle and an end?

O'Brien: Not in that sense, and certain critics have felt very unhappy about that. They've complained that the author abuses us by having a little bell tinkle at a gate, for instance, and the next thing we expect is to see someone appear around the corner of the bushes—but he doesn't appear for another fifty or seventy-five pages; in the interval we've had a lot of fascinating material, but it doesn't concern that person. We don't even know who the person is yet.

Hindus: I think that the form of the novel is probably best explained by an analogy with the Wagnerian drama. It uses the *leitmotif* as the unifying principle: certain scenes, certain obsessive memories, reappear over and over again in the course of the novel, so that we begin to recognize them and to expect certain things to follow—just

as when a certain theme is played in the orchestra in Wagner, we expect the appearance of a certain character on the stage. I think this was quite conscious on Proust's part. He was a great admirer of Wagner, and I think his novel is best thought of in terms of that analogy.

Bryson: He was a great admirer of Bergson, the French philosopher, who also gave him something of this sense of duration.

O'Brien: Certainly he must have got something from Bergson, although Proust himself always claimed that his concept of time and memory differed from that of Bergson. There's a great deal of similarity, but Proust's distinction between voluntary and involuntary memory is so basic to his work, and so dear to him, that he always insisted that it could not be found in Bergson in anything like the same terms. It is, of course, the concept that when we sit down deliberately to remember the past, we get it in only a very fragmentary and artificial way; it's the welling up within us of the past in a kind of unconscious, involuntary way that really restores it to us exactly as it was lived, with all of its detail and all of its richness.

Bryson: And yet the title in French suggests an aggressive search. It's not, in French, *Remembrance of Things Past*, as everybody knows; it's *A la recherche du temps perdu*—"in search of lost time." A search!

O'Brien: It's search and pursuit. There is an active attitude on the part of the hero and, therefore, on the part of the author. He puts himself into a mood, into a state where the welling up of the past through unconscious means will be encouraged. That's the active element. Also, there's another active element: when the past begins to come back through an identity of sensation in the present with a sensation in the past, some work has to be done upon it by the person who is experiencing this new but remembered experience. Proust speaks, for instance, of the ordinary human being who is constantly taking snapshots with his mind and with his sensations, but never developing them. The artists, such as he, has to go into a dark room, he says, and develop those snapshots. There's where the active participation comes in.

Hindus: I think time, as it appears to me in reading Proust, is one of the characters of this drama, perhaps the most important one. It's always behind the scenes, especially in the last volume, when he changes the appearance so radically of all the characters in the cast. We cannot resist feeling the importance of time itself. Proust thought that this conception of time, this feeling of time as an actuality, was going to be one of the distinguishing marks of his book. So far as I am concerned, he doesn't altogether succeed in that. As a matter of fact, perhaps it's because he died in 1922, long before the completion of this novel; that is, what we have in the last few volumes are his rough drafts and not the complete work itself. I think he had intended to make time, to make that theme, even more important than it now appears to us to be.

Bryson: But is that all there is to it? After all, the effect of time in aging the characters of a book, in showing how one generation passes and a new generation comes, one group goes down and another group comes up—that's in most of the great novelists.

Hindus: That's true.

Bryson: You certainly find it tremendously striking in a novel

by Tolstoy, for instance; you find it in Thackeray; you find in many of the great novelists this sense of time. Why did Proust think he had something new?

Hindus: Perhaps because every one of us beginning a creative task needs to think that we have something new.

Bryson: Was he fooling himself?

Hindus: Not altogether. He put an old truth in a new light, and certainly he was aware of the analogies with Tolstoy. In some of his early work it's clear that he even imitated Tolstoy. But I always come back to the universal elements in Proust because, certainly, I remember that when I first read him, I was reading him not because I had any interest in French society or in modern life or anything of that kind; I read him as I read other books. And it was because he appeared to tell me something about myself as an individual, as an American who at that time, at least, had never visited France, that he seemed important.

O'Brien: I would beg to differ, Mr. Hindus, with one of your statements: that Proust didn't really contribute something new to time, but thought perhaps that he did, or he needed to think that he did. On the contrary, I think he contributed something very original, and that was his whole feeling that he himself had overcome the ravages of time—which had aged and brought close to their death all his contemporaries—by the very function of the involuntary memory that had made him relive his past.

Bryson: I've always found this whole business of Proust's concept of time very difficult to put in any other words than those of Proust himself—and it took him how many hundreds of thousands of words to try to do it? Even then, he never finished the task. Do you mean that Proust felt that he had conquered time, as other men had not, because he could see his whole life as an organic whole, bound together by these things that welled up out of the past? Is that what he meant?

O'Brien: I think he meant that, and something a little more: that actually he had been privileged—and he uses the expression "privileged moments"—to *relive* the past.

Bryson: He could remember those days in Combray when he was a boy in his grand-aunt's house, he could remember the servants and the streets and the smell of the flowers and the things that he does in those wonderful set pieces so beautifully?

O'Brien: Yes!

Bryson: And by remembering that, he is saving it from oblivion—is that it?

O'Brien: Not quite by *remembering* it—by remembering it and then by setting it down in a work of art which is going to endure exactly like, let us say, the books of Bergotte in *Remembrance of Things Past*. The night of Bergotte's death Proust speaks of the shelves with his books on them, ranged two by two, lighted up with almost an angelic light. They are the true immortality of the artist; this very book we're discussing is Proust's immortality.

Bryson: Then he's talking about the immortality of the artist?

Hindus: Yes, but I think that this conception which you're developing is applicable not only to Proust, but to other artists as well.

I think he gives credit in the pages of his novel to Chateaubriand, for example, who had done something similar; critics have found analogies with certain passages in Ruskin concerning the revivifying power of the memory. I think that the vividness with which he recreates his own society in the mind of the reader is something that is unique, but I think the effort is one that he has in common with many other artists.

Bryson: Then, there's no new theory here of time, in your opinion? He simply is obsessed with time, as great novelists often have been to a greater or lesser degree, and succeeds in recapturing the past more vividly than others; is that what it is?

Hindus: Yes. My feeling basically is that. I think that if he had had a new conception of time, if he had done some of the things that some of his early critics gave him credit for doing, he would have belonged to the realm of philosophy—just as if he had done with society what early critics thought he was doing, he would have belonged to another realm than that of the novel. Incidentally, the fact that *he* is not a social historian doesn't mean that other novelists have not been. It is true that Balzac deals with an actual society, but I don't think Proust knew his own society in the way that Balzac did. He didn't know the stock exchange, he didn't know the labor unions, he didn't know all of those things that in contemporary France were very important. He tries to deal with them in portions of the book dealing with the Dreyfus case, but on the whole it seems to me that he is imitating Balzac rather than doing something of his own.

O'Brien: At least, it never occurred to Proust to go out into the world and become familiar with the aspects of life that he didn't know. He was absolutely against the whole concept of documenting one's self in order to give a more complete picture.

Bryson: That brings you almost necessarily to the point of saying, doesn't it, that this man's achievement—and it is tremendous, certainly one of the greatest of our time—hangs almost entirely on his style? On his style in the larger sense, his capacity to make character and scene and incident vivid?

O'Brien: Yes! As he himself said, style is a matter of vision. Each individual man has a vision which differs from every other individual man's vision; consequently, Proust's vision of the world, of his contemporaries, and of the individuals that he met and knew, comes through in his book clothed in words and images which only he could have created.

Hindus: And I think it should be said that he succeeds far better in creating his world, in communicating it to the reader, than all of the realistic and naturalistic novelists of his time. I don't know why that is, precisely. That's too big a question to discuss here; but, certainly, his success in creating that world of his own is unique, and I'm one of those who think that he created the greatest novel in the literature of the world since the turn of the twentieth century.

Bryson: He invites you into that world and shows you its beauties, which far surpass its ugliness, although that's there. It's something of an undertaking to start reading Proust, but I think I would agree with you: if one wants to see the summit of prose writing in our time, Proust's novel is probably the place to look for it.

JOSEPH CONRAD

Lord Jim

(As broadcast January 30, 1955)

LEO GURKO

• VIRGILIA PETERSON

• LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: Conrad always seems to me to have some difficulty getting out from behind his Malayan jungle disguise and showing himself for what he truly was: a writer who was mostly concerned with moral problems, not with romance at all.

Gurko: The great moral problem of *Lord Jim*—which is in some ways one of his most fascinating and compelling books, just as a sheer story, aside from its ideas—is the theme of Lord Jim's breach of faith with himself and, consequently, with humanity as a whole. He has this high and idealistic conception of how a human being ought to behave.

Bryson: You mean the way Jim himself ought to behave?

Gurko: Jim himself, yes: loyally, bravely, particularly when he's tested by the emergencies that Conrad arranges to come his way. The book is really an account, drawn tight with terrific psychological pressure, of how Jim struggles and finally succeeds in meeting his own moral tests.

Peterson: In the beginning, of course, Jim is presented as a British parson's son who takes training in the crew of a training ship off the coast of England.

Bryson: It's a kind of double dose of morality, isn't it? First, he's the son of a parson and has to behave by British village ideas of behavior, and then he goes to a school for young sailors and has to acquire a still more rigid morality.

Peterson: But he's also a gentleman.

Bryson: That's number three.

Peterson: As the narrator, Marlow, so often reminds us, "He's one of us," and therefore more is expected of him than perhaps would have been had he not had that background and opportunity. And in the very beginning of the book he meets his first failure . . .

Bryson: As a boy.

Peterson: . . . As a boy on the ship. A squall comes up and one ship bumps into another; the other boys man a lifeboat and rush to the disaster while he is still leaning over the ship, watching all of it and deciding. He then, of course, begins the process of rationalization by which he tries to get through the whole of his life: he explains to himself that it wasn't much and that when the real conflict came, the real danger, he would be all right.

Gurko: Some chapters later come his second test and his second failure. He's older now and more mature, and the quality and texture of his experience is now more complex. The whole book really is a progression from simplicity to complexity, and at the end of the book, during the course of his greatest trial, his relationship with humanity

—the psychological density of the situation—reaches its climax. His second failure comes aboard the *Patna*, a pilgrim ship carrying 800 sleeping Moslems through the Red Sea on their way to Mecca.

Bryson: Now he has responsibility, and he knows it; he's an officer of the ship.

Gurko: And therefore the moral situation in which he finds himself presses upon him much more heavily; it's much more meaningful to us, as well, than it was the first time. And he fails this second time, as he did the first time. When he leaves the *Patna*, together with the other officers, who were rascally and superficial characters, he jumps into a lifeboat; and he says it's like leaping into an everlasting black hole. This image of plunging into darkness, into the pit, from which he must seek to extricate himself later, provides us with one of the great jumping-off places.

Peterson: Conrad got his idea for the *Patna* episode from an actual case—an incident involving the pilgrim ship *Jeddah* in 1880. What really happened on that ship is a little different from Conrad's version: the Moslems were *not* asleep, not unaware that they were being deserted in the middle of the sea. In the real ship they went below in utter silence and put on their shrouds—because every Moslem carries a shroud with him—and came back on deck and watched the officers desert them. It's extraordinary to me that Conrad didn't use that.

Bryson: I think I know why. As he tells the story, he has these rascals run away because they intended to; they thought the ship was going down—they weren't going to lose their own lives. They committed the worst sin of sailors: they deserted their own ship. Jim at the last minute went with them because he didn't quite have the—what shall we say?—decision not to. He wanted those people to be sleeping and helpless. After all, the Moslems in their shrouds watching their officers desert would be morally superior to everything, even to death. It would have shifted our attention to them. Perhaps it's necessary to say to people who don't remember what happened that the ship didn't go down at all. It was discovered, with its whole complement of passengers safe, foundering helplessly in the sea with no officers there to guide it because they had run away.

Gurko: Well, he does use one little touch of the actual incident. Remember that during the period of hesitation—while the lifeboat is being put into the water by the other officers and Jim stands in a kind of moral paralysis, wondering what to do—two Malay sailors are steering the ship; they're staring at the white officers seeking to get away and they seem to have no idea of what's going on. To them, the actions and behavior of the white men are utterly mysterious. And this lends a note of fascination to the scene itself, a commentary on the gulf that exists between Jim and the ship's passengers; it is signified later, on the remote island of Patusan, in the relationship between Jim and the proud but essentially passive natives, in whose eyes he at last redeems himself.

Peterson: Of course, the story of the *Patna* is not told directly but "in and out," like an iceberg seen through a fog, at the inquiry. When the lifeboat is picked up with the four men who deserted the ship, three of them run away as soon as they get to eastern port where the inquiry is held; Jim alone has to answer to the questions in court. And we first see him—through the eyes of Marlow, the narrator whom Conrad is

always using in his stories—telling us as best he can what happened, facing up when the others ran away, and yet trying *not* to face up with that everlasting despair that man has before his own guilt. Although he attempts to make it look better than it really was, inside himself he can't make it look any better. Then we have Marlow, who was in the courthouse, picking Jim up and taking him to dinner, where Jim tells his own version of the story. And this, to me, is one of the most moving analyses of the human soul that I have ever read—Jim's account of that story.

Bryson: Trying to explain.

Peterson: Not trying to conceal the truth from Marlow, but trying to find a way of making the truth look better to himself—and being unable to do so. Somewhere in the book Conrad himself says, "It is my belief that no man ever quite understood his own artful dodges to escape from the grim shadow of self-knowledge." This is the thing that makes the book universal, because we all know what Conrad means when he says that.

Gurko: One of the important aspects of Jim's appearance at the inquiry is that it would have been easy for him to run away and not show up to be punished and exposed. . . .

Bryson: The other officers did.

Gurko: Just as the others did. But there is in him this compulsion to face up to his own situation, this constant desire to expose himself to experience, to provide himself, as it were, with every opportunity to live up to the high ideal that he has sought to accomplish but has fallen short of on so many occasions. The complexity of the whole relationship between Marlow and Jim lies in the combination, which we find so often in his best writing, of Conrad the psychologist and Conrad the moralist. He takes the problem of how a human being should behave, and he takes his own insight into the character and personality of that human being, and brings them together in a kind of focus, which provides the book with its fascinating complexity.

Bryson: I'm never quite sure just what Conrad is doing here when he gives us, as Miss Peterson says, this tremendously moving scene of Jim trying to explain himself. I'm not sure that Conrad isn't criticizing the rigidity of the moral system by which Jim was asked to live—not that you can be a sailor unless you can live by that. But Conrad may be saying that there are some kinds of people—after all, this is a Hamlet character—who are too sensitive, whose decisions have too much thought in them, who are too "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of doubt" to be sailors; this is not the kind of person who should be a sailor, and Jim is the wrong kind of person to have to face decisions of this kind. Did he mean that?

Peterson: I'm not sure, because Conrad, being a Pole, had a high concept of honor—what some people would call a romantic concept. I don't think that Conrad—in presenting Jim as so big, so well-developed, such a handsome lad, so perfect in every way—was saying that he wasn't the person to be at sea, but that he had a fatal flaw that he should not have had. Although he looked as if he were the kind of person people would automatically trust with responsibility, he had a secret flaw that determined his fate.

Gurko: And yet, isn't it true that Conrad is saying about all the people in the book—even the people who do their duty bravely and unhesitatingly, like the French lieutenant, and Marlow, and that fabulous Dutch trader, Stein, with his passion for butterflies, the man who succeeds both in the realm of duty and idealism and in the realm of money, trade and physical action, all at the same time—isn't Conrad saying about all of them that every human being is a mixture of the perfect and the imperfect, of bravery and cowardice? The French lieutenant, for example, says to Marlow that there was a time in his life when *he* was exposed to temptation and to pressure, and didn't face up to them. And Stein's comment is: "I understand Jim because, though I am successful now, there were four or five earlier occasions in my life when I fell short of my own high ideals." To understand people and to understand themselves, Conrad is forever declaring—this is his perpetual theme—men must expose themselves to the pressure of life and experience.

Peterson: He is also generalizing about the possibility that any one of us could have done and might have done what Lord Jim did, because he says: "From weakness unknown but perhaps suspected, as in some parts of the world you suspect a deadly snake in every bush, from weakness that may lie hidden, watched or unwatched, played against or manfully scorned, repressed or maybe ignored more than half a lifetime, not one of us is safe."

Bryson: That's true. He keeps saying that. There's no question about it, even though I may be trying to make him somewhat more devious and subtle than he really was. After all, here is—as you pointed out, Miss Peterson—the structure of a Greek tragedy. Here's a hero with a flaw in him, and the flaw finally destroys him. He's not destroyed because of his wickedness, he's destroyed because his virtues aren't perfect. Jim is not, in the ordinary sense, a coward. Every time he fails, it is only after struggles of great cost to himself. He hurts himself trying to regain the acceptance of mankind in this rather sleazy and very difficult Eastern world, and each time he sinks a little lower.

Peterson: If he'd been a real coward, there wouldn't have been any story.

Bryson: There'd have been no drama. He isn't a coward in that sense, but he keeps failing, slipping back; his past catches up with him, he slips again; he keeps going down, down, down—because this is a kind of slum, this part of the world, for the white man who doesn't maintain his ideals. That, I think, is the irony of the term "Lord" Jim. Of course, it's not a very accurate translation of the Malay *Tuan*, which means "master" rather than "lord." But I think that's part of it. The natives look at this man, because he was a white man, as *Tuan*—Master.

Gurko: I should disagree with you about Jim not being a coward.

Bryson: Not a simple coward!

Gurko: No, not a simple coward. Let us say a fascinating, complicated and, therefore, very interesting and dramatic coward. But that he is a coward is, I think, unmistakable. The whole of his behavior is within the framework of what the world ordinarily defines cowardice to be. He is immensely conscious of his own cowardice;

so is Marlow; so were all the people who comment upon him. Now, he is, of course, much more than a coward: he is also a brave man. And it is in the contrast, the dramatic and important and ultimately moral contrast, between his capacity for cowardice and his capacity for heroism that the book acquires its principal tension.

Peterson: Of course he is a brave man *and* a coward. So are we all! That's what makes Lord Jim acceptable to all of us. I have a slight axe to grind with Mr. Conrad, because in a later preface to the book—apparently some lady in Italy sent word that the whole story was morbid and she didn't care for it—he says, "Of course, the subject itself being rather foreign to women's normal sensibilities . . ." As a representative of that unfortunate sex, I would like to say that this only applies to some women; the concept of honor, the concept of courage, is something that many women actually do understand, and expect not only of their men but of themselves.

Bryson: That was not the Polish idea, was it, Miss Peterson?

Peterson: It was certainly not a Polish idea, because if ever women were the moral backbone of a country, it was in Poland. I daresay Conrad's mother was the very one who infused in him such a fantastically sensitive sense of honor as he had.

Gurko: I should like to say a word—since we've already talked of Conrad as a moralist and a psychologist—about Conrad as a writer. He has two other qualities as a writer that make him terribly impressive to anyone reading his novels today. One is his wonderful and famous ability to describe nature.

Bryson: Some people read him just for that.

Gurko: But the important thing about his descriptions of nature is that these descriptions are never merely ornamental. Nature isn't just a kind of pretty or exotic backdrop to the adventures of his heroes. On the contrary, nature is always one of the principal actors in the drama. The storm at sea, in Jim's first experience as a midshipman, is one of the factors in paralyzing him. The placidity and heat of the ocean during the scenes on the *Patna* is used as a psychological instrument, again, to freeze him into that terrible inertia which finally results in his second act of cowardice. And nature, throughout, is a vast, complex, inscrutable framework which presses upon us; it leads us to remember that Conrad always said that there is a contrast to be drawn between people living in placid comfort and safety in western Europe, and the same people being thrust into the savagery and difficulties of life in the Malayan archipelago or the Pacific islands. This is why most of his famous novels deal with western Europeans who have their great experiences in a savage climate.

Bryson: He was a little romantic about that.

Peterson: Well, the exoticism makes a better story for people to read; but, as a matter of fact, the test can come in a two-room apartment in the Bronx just as well. To bring in the exotic background is really just a device. I think Conrad believed that you had to face the moral test wherever you lived, in no matter what room, in no matter what climate.

Gurko: Well, in *Lord Jim* I think he makes it fairly explicit in

the contrast between Jim's father, the parson, back home, uttering his profound but superficial moralities and theologies to his comfortable parishioners, and Jim's experiences with these moral doctrines out in the Far East.

Bryson: Yes, I'm sure that's true, and that that's what Conrad intended. But some other writers might have pointed out to him that Jim's father's parishioners, sitting in their pews, were probably going through moral dramas quite as exciting as anything that was happening in the jungles of Malaya.

Peterson: Jane Austen might have!

Bryson: Except that Jim's father, being an obtuse man, didn't see them happening. However, as you say, nature is always a character in the drama. And that seems to me part of the final scene of the drama—the fifth act, so to speak—when Jim, sinking away from a position in the white world, still does not lose the superior position of the white man in the Malay world, where he is Tuan Jim, where he is master, where he is the man in whom great trust is put. That's the one time he doesn't fail.

Peterson: But it's more his opportunity to redeem himself, and he seizes the opportunity. He might not have. He was given the opportunity to go and work at a trading post in this place forty miles up a river and far from everywhere, and for two years he answers his own requirements of himself—for two years he shows courage all along the line; he straightens out a terrible feud between the natives, he settles himself there as a person of responsibility; everyone comes to him and trusts him, above all, and this trust means everything to him. He wouldn't dream of leaving this place—not really because they were Malays and he was a white man, but because he knew that he rated their trust.

Bryson: He had lost his chance to be trusted in the white world—that's what I meant.

Gurko: There's one other thing to note in the difference between Patusan, where he redeems himself at the end, and the scene aboard the *Patna*. His human relationships with various individual Malays in Patusan, his friendship for the Crown Prince, his love for the girl, Jewel, his almost filial relationship with the chief of the island—all this has thrust him into the human community in a way that is lacking aboard the *Patna*. On the *Patna* the 800 sleeping pilgrims are anonymous strangers to him; he's all alone with the sea and his own problem. Perhaps one reason why it is possible for him to redeem himself at the end, though he behaves as a coward earlier, is that he has become involved in human society in an intimate, personal way. It's almost as though Conrad were sounding the theme of human love and human communication as a factor in our heroic behavior. This recalls to us a remark that the French lieutenant makes much earlier in the book, when he says that the thing, really, that keeps us all from not being cowards all the time is our existence in a human community—the fact that there are people around us looking at us, trusting us, relying upon us all the time. This remark is picked up and made one of the great dramatic instruments in Jim's final redemption on

Patusan. Love, then, as well as honor, is one of the great themes of *Lord Jim*.

Bryson: The redemption comes, I think one must add, in giving up his life rather than betray a friend—or giving up his life because he seems to have betrayed a friend.

Gurko: And it's fascinating to note that the voice, at the end, in Patusan, which urges him to run away and not give up his life and not live up to his high ideals is in this case the voice of love—the voice of the girl, who pleads with him to run away—and not the voice of the rascally German captain aboard the *Patna*. Temptation comes to us in various forms and guises.

Peterson: She is perhaps Conrad's concept of a woman, because she cares far less for Lord Jim's honor than for having him around. One of the most dramatic scenes, I think, is where Marlow, the narrator, goes to Patusan to see how Lord Jim is doing. He has a conversation with this girl, Jewel, who is afraid that Jim is going to leave her. She says, "The white men always come and go." She is afraid that Marlow has come to take him away, but he explains that the world did not want Jim, it had forgotten him, it would not even know him. "Why?" she murmured. "And I felt," Marlow says, "that sort of rage one feels during a hard tussle." "Why? Speak!" the girl says. "'You want to know?' I asked in a fury. 'Yes,' she cried. 'Because he is not good enough,'" said Marlow brutally. This, I think, is one of the bitterest things—and very subtle of Conrad, because I don't believe that Conrad felt Lord Jim was not good enough.

Bryson: I always feel that Marlow isn't all of Conrad. He isn't just the voice of the author. He's a real human being with a certain obtuseness of his own.

Peterson: He's used by the author as an instrument, so that the author does not speak directly for himself and yet can give the overtones of his more subtle and more imaginative sense of life.

Gurko: Lord Jim is seen, as a matter of fact, through a whole series of lenses: through the eyes of the French lieutenant; through the eyes of the Australian outcast after the trial, urging him to take this repulsive job on a guano island; through the eyes of Stein and the girl.

Bryson: And his own eyes, Mr. Gurko!

Gurko: And his own eyes, too.

Bryson: Well, all right, now: does he get redeemed? I mean, does this moral drama work itself out? Are you satisfied morally? Does Jim come out at the height of his own ideal of himself?

Peterson: Marlow was not satisfied, but the reader is, I believe.

Bryson: That's part of Marlow's obtuseness. Do you think Conrad means you to be satisfied?

Peterson: Satisfied as much as you can be by what obsesses him so, which is the tragedy of man.

Bryson: Oh, I don't mean satisfied with the fate of man. I mean satisfied that Jim . . .

Peterson: Accomplished his fate in an honorable way?

Bryson: As an autonomous moral agent.

Peterson: I think you do; I think that is what Conrad means you to feel.

Gurko: I feel that Conrad leaves that question ultimately enigmatic, which recalls to us that one of the central images running all through the book—and all through Conrad's writings generally—is the image of the enigma. The world is a mystery; there comes a point beyond which we cannot penetrate; there comes a point even in the behavior of any human being which we cannot ultimately resolve. The last time that we see Jim is through Marlow's eyes, when he sails off in this boat and sees Jim on the edge of the shore—a small, round, white spot in the midst of a darkening universe. This, I think, is Conrad's parable with regard to the whole human condition: that we can see ultimately only so far—and then, at the last, the enveloping mist sets in. As to the question of whether Jim is redeemed . . . obviously he is redeemed, in terms of simple action. He behaves bravely; he gives up his life after his terrible mistake with regard to the villain, Brown, who penetrates into the island and destroys his best friend. Therefore he must give himself up and die. In terms of the mechanics of Greek tragedy, it works out perfectly. In terms of the impact of Jim's moral situation upon us, there are always unanswered questions and nuances which Conrad deliberately leaves ambiguous. This is a part of his whole theory and vision of life.

Peterson: Yet you have the feeling that Conrad in a way loved Lord Jim, that Jim was a kind of exponent of Conrad himself. He keeps talking about Lord Jim's imagination—which, of course, Conrad had to an immense degree himself. He calls imagination "the enemy of man, the father of all terrors," and he talks about Lord Jim's "swift and forestalling vision"—which I think is a wonderful picture of what happened to him. When he made the fatal decision to be a coward, he had a swift and forestalling vision of all those 800 pilgrims in the sea, of everyone crying and drowning, and his very imagination paralyzed him.

Bryson: I suppose part of Conrad's irony is that, against this mystery, he shows man's moral structures as being complete for man, but perhaps rather puny; they are ironically unimportant things against the ultimate mystery of the universe, and the tragedy of man's existence.

Gurko: Perhaps we ought to say that Conrad is a wonderful writer, just in terms of sheer story-telling. One of the most exciting and dramatic scenes in all modern literature is the scene aboard the *Patna*, and there are eight or nine other exciting and wonderfully narrated scenes and moments during the whole course of the book. Aside from Conrad's moral ideas, aside from his psychological penetration, aside from his descriptions of nature, they are marvelously absorbing and exciting just in terms of sheer readability.

Peterson: Also, it's singularly appropriate today, at a time when loyalties are being challenged all over the world, because loyalty to a ship and loyalty to the ship of state are actually the same thing; I think we'd have to say, though one hates to, that Lord Jim was a "poor security risk."

Bryson: He certainly was. And he was the kind of person who struggles, seemingly defeated over and over again, to restore himself to moral stature and to the acceptance of men after having done something which men quite properly condemn. I think one reason why we talk about the moral side of a book like this is because it's harder to talk about the structure. There's no use trying to convey in anything but Conrad's own magnificent words his style, his sense of character, his sense of nature. Isn't that right?

Gurko: The terrific importance of Conrad, of course, lies in his moral and psychological insights. But one should always note that these insights just don't hang in the air; they're a part of the excitement of reading one of the great narrative and dramatic writers of modern times.

Bryson: And, like every other great book, each time you read it you discover another layer of meaning.

DOSTOEVSKY

Crime and Punishment

(As broadcast February 6, 1955)

FRANK O'CONNOR • ERNEST J. SIMMONS • LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: I suppose we approach a Russian novel today with somewhat different attitudes than those we used to have. But whenever one comes in contact with Dostoevsky, it seems to me that it's a new world anyhow; you're coming into a kind of universe where strange and terrible people frighten you by their uncanny resemblance to human beings. Is that just an Anglo-Saxon reaction to a great Russian writer?

O'Connor: I wonder; I suspect we've got a fiction of the Russian character in our mind.

Simmons: I think you must take into consideration that Dostoevsky, apart from being one of the world's great writers, was also one of the world's most *successful* writers.

Bryson: Do you mean artistically?

Simmons: Artistically, and also from the point of view of sheer entertainment value—which he never lost sight of in his books. As a matter of fact, when this novel we are discussing today, *Crime and Punishment*, first came out, it was reported in the Russian press that "well people grew ill" from reading it.

Bryson: And ill people well?

Simmons: I doubt whether very many ill people grew well.

O'Connor: Mr. Simmons, that sounds to me like a very peculiar definition of entertainment!

Bryson: I don't know; people like a good cry, Mr. O'Connor. Your own Irish readers like to cry, don't they?

O'Connor: Ah, a little cry is a different thing—but getting ill!

Bryson: Mr. O'Connor, what does a practitioner in the art of fiction think about a book like this? How does it strike you?

O'Connor: I think that I'm struck principally by the enormous power which Dostoevsky wielded. Up to the time this book appeared, the nineteenth-century novel had been following a certain path; all the great nineteenth-century novelists can be gathered under one head. But suddenly you find a book like this, which cannot be described under any of the conventional headings of the nineteenth-century novel; and then you look a little bit farther and you see Proust and Joyce and Lawrence and Gide, all of them deriving from Dostoevsky. Then, I think, you feel that this man wielded a tremendous power, and you wonder whether it was for the best.

Bryson: Do you mean for the best of the novel or the best for humanity? Perhaps both?

O'Connor: I think really in terms of humanity, at the moment, because of the neurotic streak in this novel which released the neurotic streak in modern literature. I consider Dostoevsky as the first of the neurotic novelists, and by neurotic I don't entirely mean ill—nervously ill. I mean the novelist in whom the relationship of subject and object is no longer obvious, no longer consistent—where, as in this book, you get a character who is a murderer and a character who's an examining magistrate. As you're reading, you realize they're both the same character—that, in fact, all you're dealing with is the aspects of personality; you're not dealing with characters.

Simmons: The introduction of the neurotic theme, though, was something new. If we had stayed up on the plateau of nineteenth-century fiction in western Europe, we would have desperately needed a "new word." It was Dostoevsky who uttered that new word, and hence has been largely responsible for the very thriving development of fiction ever since.

Bryson: Didn't Dostoevsky break the form, break through the reticences as if he had opened doors that decorum had kept thoroughly shut? Isn't that always questionable, perhaps, or do you justify it on the grounds that he taught us deeper truths than we otherwise would have seen?

Simmons: I think he not only taught us deeper truths, but placed an emphasis upon psychological analysis in fiction which has contributed greatly to the further development of the drama. If, for example, you take his approach to this novel itself, if we ask ourselves just what is the story of *Crime and Punishment*, I suppose we could reduce it to its simplest terms by saying that it is the story of a young university student in St. Petersburg. He is poverty-stricken. His mother and his sister, who is the object of the lascivious attentions of a land-owner, are also poverty-stricken, and he decides that by murdering an old money-lender and appropriating her money he will be able to help out all of them.

Bryson: The perfect crime for the perfect motive, Mr. Simmons?

Simmons: The "perfect crime for the perfect motive." But there is still another element introduced into this extraordinary tale, and it is that Raskolnikov, the student, is essentially an intellectual. Hence he finds it necessary to justify this intended crime by developing a whole theory of what he calls the ordinary and the extraordinary people in the world. Now, of course, the mass of people he places among the ordinary ones. . .

Bryson: Who could be killed for good ends?

Simmons: By the extraordinary ones—that is, the leaders, the people who dare, the Napoleons of the world. He wishes to take his place among the extraordinary people.

O'Connor: But is that the real reason for Raskolnikov's crime? Remember, this is introduced practically at the end of the book. We're told by the examining magistrate that Raskolnikov had written an article dealing with the responsibilities of a man who feels himself a Napoleon, and like a Napoleon entitled to take life as he pleases. But the Raskolnikov we meet for the first three quarters of the book isn't a Napoleon at all; we're told nothing about this article of his. What we *are* told is that he has gone into the question of crime and that he believes crime is almost always a disease. What I'm really trying to do is to make a distinction between this intellectual attitude toward Raskolnikov's crime and my own, if you like, psychological attitude toward it, which simply says "Here is a neurotic who is acting compulsively." Am I right about that?

Simmons: Well, you seem to have a good deal of certitude. But if I should ask you what *is* the motive of *Crime and Punishment*, I wonder whether you could tell me?

O'Connor: Now, that's a very difficult problem!

Bryson: Both of you gentlemen seem to be rejecting the idea that the motive is what Raskolnikov himself said it was: to get some money and help his family.

O'Connor: I think that's true, but it doesn't emerge until much later. In the early part of the book, it's decidedly presented as a compulsive act, the result of a dream in which Raskolnikov sees a horse being beaten to death; he relates this to the old money-lender, whom he is going to kill, and he feels the influence of this dream over him as he moves in a somnambulistic state to the place where he's going to kill her. There is no suggestion in the early part that there is an act of the will involved.

Simmons: I agree. The description of the killing of the horse, by the way, is one of the most gruesome passages in all literature. But when I said I didn't think that you could possibly tell me exactly what the motive for the crime is, it is based on the simple fact that I don't think Raskolnikov himself actually knew why he did it.

Bryson: Does Dostoevsky mean, then, to indicate that he *had* no clear motive, and that we should not see in it any more than Raskolnikov himself saw?

Simmons: No, I think that Dostoevsky's intention was to present a logical motive, such as I have outlined, but he also wishes to indicate that Raskolnikov himself is an ambivalent person, fluctuating between

the extremes of towering pride and submissiveness. As he tries to find his way out of this trap of motivation, he agrees, first, that he is going to commit the crime because he wants to get money to help his mother and sister; then he abandons that motive, and says that he wishes to commit the crime because he wants to take his place among the extraordinary people, and to dare. He says to Sonia Marmeladova, you may remember, how ugly it is for a Napoleon to crawl under a filthy old money-lender's bed for her money. In short, all these motives are accepted and rejected by Raskolnikov because, in his ambivalent, confused state of mind, he cannot accept any one of them as the right motive.

O'Connor: It seems to me that Mr. Simmons is making my case very nicely. In fact, he is pointing out that this is a study of a neurosis; there is no definite attitude on Raskolnikov's part.

Simmons: What is there wrong in a study of a neurosis? I rather think that there are an awful lot of people walking around these days with neuroses, just as there undoubtedly were in the 1860's when Dostoevsky wrote this novel. I think the point that Dostoevsky is making is that Raskolnikov's great crime really is that he is a victim of reason, that he is attempting to work out an accepted view in society by reasoning his way through it.

O'Connor: Yes! I think you've really got down to the fact which we've got to make clear—we've got to agree on this thing: Dostoevsky hated human reason, although he certainly had a very fine intellect himself. He was the victim of his own intellect. I mean that he is Raskolnikov, just as he is Svidrigailov, just as he is Ivan Karamazov; in all of them you see this punishment of the intellect for daring to try to face the orderly problems of life. Would you agree with that?

Simmons: Not entirely. To be sure, the common conception of Dostoevsky is that he is one of the great irrationalists in world literature, and I think essentially that is true. But his criticism of reason is largely extended to the use of it in solving the ills of mankind, as he understood those ills. Take Raskolnikov as an example. You remember that after he has committed the crime, he goes through a whole series of torturing doubts as to whether or not the guilt he had taken upon himself was worth while. It's not actually until he talks with that wonderful creation, Sonia Marmeladova, that he begins to have a feeling that the theory he has developed is not actually the way out of the impasse of his life, and hence he begins to repent for his crime.

Bryson: Yes. Punishment *does* begin to enter into this story fairly soon after the crime is committed, doesn't it? It's not only a study of crime; it's a story of what crime does to the criminal. Is Dostoevsky saying that if Raskolnikov had not been cursed with an intellect, he might have committed this crime and not repented it?

Simmons: I think the point Dostoevsky makes is that Raskolnikov tries to apply a rational approach to life in order to solve not only his own ills, but the ills of mankind in general.

Bryson: Which are essentially moral in Dostoevsky's idea.

Simmons: Yes. But how does Dostoevsky have Raskolnikov re-

solve his ambivalence? That, I think, is really one of the essential problems of the novel.

O'Connor: I wonder, again, at this. You see, the feeling I have about Raskolnikov is that in him, as in Karamazov and all his other characters, Dostoevsky is attacking the intellect. And here you've come to the religious element in Dostoevsky, which has to be considered when you're discussing a book like this. Dostoevsky's real objection to the use of the intellect is that, ultimately, it implies atheism—even though we know that Dostoevsky himself was an atheist. And all these intellectual characters are driven to crime, because once they no longer believe in God, anything is permitted. That is the cry all through Dostoevsky. That's his real fear of reason: admit reason and you admit crime.

Simmons: Obviously, your definition of atheism doesn't accord with mine. Actually, I think that Dostoevsky all his life was engaged in a search for God. And I think *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot*, *The Possessed* and *The Brothers Karamazov* are all contributions to that search.

Bryson: That still would agree with your own statement, Mr. Simmons, that he was always, throughout his life, fighting an ambivalence. Wasn't part of his ambivalence that intellectually he couldn't accept the idea of God, but emotionally and morally he had to have the idea of God?

Simmons: Precisely! I thoroughly agree with this. As a matter of fact, it is substantiated in one of Dostoevsky's notebooks, in which he wrote a simple statement, right towards the end of his life, about *The Brothers Karamazov*. He notes that a critic had severely criticized this book for various reasons, and Dostoevsky adds: "Yes, but this critic does not seem to realize that nowhere in fiction has God ever been so powerfully repudiated as he was in *The Brothers Karamazov*." That is, he took a real pride in Ivan Karamazov's repudiation of God—and yet, at the same time, the whole direction of the book is a search for this God.

O'Connor: That seems to me to put it very neatly. I am very impressed by what Mr. Bryson said. That is exactly where the ambivalence in Dostoevsky comes out: the fact that he doesn't really believe in God, but believes in Christ, who is one of the central figures in *Crime and Punishment*.

Bryson: Now, that ambivalence may be part of his strength as an artist. Could it be?

O'Connor: Yes. I think every writer has a certain ambivalence. I can't think of any great novelist who isn't in conflict between two poles of his own experience, his judgment and his instinct, and undoubtedly this is true of Dostoevsky. But I just wonder whether that is really the most significant thing about him, whether that is what makes him the great writer he undoubtedly is.

Bryson: What do you think is? It seems to me that one ought to make up his mind about this tremendous force, because reading Dostoevsky is not like reading any other book in the world. It's a chunk of your life. What is this tremendous impression of power? To me,

even Tolstoy doesn't have it; and men whom I might consider greater novelists—Proust, for instance—don't give me the same sense of power. Now, what is it? Is it this vast apparatus of characters, this depth of moral involvement?

O'Connor: I think you yourself answered the question several minutes ago when you said, "For the first time the doors are open." Dostoevsky has this enormous power of the initiator. For the first time the doors are open on what goes on in the subconscious mind, thirty years before Freud discovered what was going on there. And I think that is what gives him his power.

Simmons: Well, beyond that, I also feel that he is able by virtue of his extraordinary talents to symbolize, universalize, and dramatize the great and leading ideas of our time. This ability is even, I think, more supremely felt in a book like *The Brothers Karamazov*, but it is also tremendously felt in *Crime and Punishment*. After all, the problem that faces Raskolnikov is a problem that faces many of the people of the world in one form or another. I don't mean that they are all committing murders, but. . .

Bryson: They're doing the wrong thing in order to get something they want to do good with.

Simmons: That's right. And they often feel a tremendous sense of guilt at their imperfections, their failures. There is, I suppose, a good deal of ambivalence in all of us. And the struggle that went on in Raskolnikov's mind is a struggle that goes on in the minds of many people today. By virtue of that fact, in reading the book we tend to identify ourselves with the essential problem of Raskolnikov.

Bryson: What about his actual style as a writer? I don't read Russian, as you know. When I read him in translations—and I've tried several which I'd been told were good—there is, well, something that is not in Turgenev, for instance; there's a kind of crowding of the canvas; there's a kind of pushing, as if you'd immersed yourself in a lot of people who were all around you, and some of them you couldn't even get a look at.

Simmons: It's there, of course, that Dostoevsky was unlike so many novelists of the period: he was infinitely more interested in what he was saying than in how he was saying it.

Bryson: You mean he didn't write good Russian?

Simmons: I wouldn't go so far as to say that, but his Russian is rather tortuous and involved, full of neologisms and extremely difficult to read for a person who has acquired the language and is not born to it. As a consequence, I think, his handling in translation has been less successful than that of other Russian authors.

Bryson: The power comes through, though.

Simmons: The power comes through, I think, because of Dostoevsky's extraordinary ability to dramatize the great scenes and situations of his novels. If I may use a hard word, he is in a sense a dialectician; that is, he can argue just as persuasively on one side as on the other side of the great problems that he promulgates in his book. In *Crime and Punishment* one finds a startling example of that, because there is in existence a series of notebooks in which we have

his earlier drafts and his efforts at drawing his characters first, before he became convinced of the way he should proceed. In one of these efforts he has Raskolnikov talking to the Inspector, arguing the essence of moral guilt, and he says: "Why should I stand idly by? Should I allow an old money-lender to pass unnoticed and not do anything about it?" He continues this argument, and then in the margin he scribbles: "Devil take it! He's partly right"—indicating, of course, that he was convinced by his own argument. And I must say that I sometimes am convinced by Raskolnikov's argument for the justification of the murder.

Bryson: Remark that, Mr. O'Connor. Destroy your notebooks! Don't let them lie about for some critic or historian of literature to discover how you got your effects. Are you convinced, ever, by Raskolnikov's arguments?

O'Connor: No, I'm afraid I'm not even convinced by Raskolnikov as a character. Dostoevsky takes great joy in these long discussions, but to me it's rather reminiscent of the sort of joy I felt when I was seventeen or eighteen and used to argue endlessly about evil in the universe, about Hegel, about anything that came handy. It's wonderful. You get it, for instance, in that tremendous scene in *Karamazov* where they discuss God and the nature of evil. It's so like—it is superbly rendered—the sort of thing we did as adolescents. But I don't think that is the way grownups discuss anything.

Bryson: But now the idea of guilt: you used the word yourself a moment ago, Mr. O'Connor. Guilt comes into this. Punishment doesn't really come, in the sense of merely getting caught. Is he saying that if you commit an unrighteousness, a great crime, you will be compelled by your own self to purge yourself—that reason never will tell you? It seems to me reason might have told Raskolnikov that, as well as the other things it told him. You see, I quarrel with this love of irrationality which may be somewhat unfairly attributed to Dostoevsky, but which has some justice in it.

Simmons: To be sure, he always uses a very rational approach to achieve his irrationalism. That goes without saying!

Bryson: That's an old trick.

Simmons: But you might observe in the epilogue to the novel—which, personally, I considered the least successful aspect of it artistically—that he does make an effort to have Raskolnikov resolve his ambivalence; and he does it, I suppose, by means which a novelist today would find hard to accept. You may recall that he has a symbolic dream in which a plague sweeps over the earth and people get to fighting each other; nobody can find a way out of this, although everybody is attempting to reason his way out. Then Dostoevsky signifies that man, after all, cannot live by reason alone; and under the careful and loving ministrations of Sonia in the epilogue, Raskolnikov finally decides that he can achieve the resolution of his difficulty by salvation through suffering.

O'Connor: Well, Mr. Bryson, I agree with you—this is not a novel about crime and punishment, it's a novel about guilt. And anything more unconvincing than the end of it, I can't imagine. My feeling

is, you see, that the question is never resolved. It never can be resolved. There are two crimes: there's the crime of Raskolnikov and the crime of Svidrigailov. At the end of it, Dostoevsky says, "Well, perhaps there is forgiveness; perhaps there isn't forgiveness; perhaps all you can do is commit suicide."

Simmons: I agree with you heartily in this statement, because I don't think there is ever any resolution for the ambivalent characters of Dostoevsky, the great characters such as Raskolnikov and Ivan Karamazov. Neither was there any resolution for his own ambivalence, which is projected into these characters.

Bryson: And no doubt, gentlemen, the endless fascination of a truly powerful writer of this kind would be dissipated if some simple little logical sentence could unlock or resolve all his troubles.

WALT WHITMAN

Leaves of Grass

(As broadcast February 13, 1955)

GAY WILSON ALLEN

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DAVID DAICHES

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LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: When Whitman produced his first edition of *Leaves of Grass* a hundred years ago, and launched himself on the long development of that book into a lifetime career, I think one can't help noticing that it was in England that he had the first real critical understanding. Was that, Mr. Daiches—since you speak for British scholarship in this discussion—because he was something strange and queer, a kind of native, singing his "barbaric yawp," as he himself called it, or because the British saw something in it more universal than the Americans could see?

Daiches: I think the picture of Whitman as the trans-Atlantic barbarian that they were waiting for in Europe has been overdone. The thing that is most fascinating about Whitman to me, and I think to most British readers from the beginning, is his remarkable way of uniting a personal lyrical existence with an epic outward vision—that strange and new combination of the lyrical and the epic. This pose of autobiographical carelessness, as though all this is just his own ego welling up, is, of course, very deliberately deceptive; he's much more artful than that. The *Song of Myself*, for example, is not a song of himself in any simple, spontaneous lyrical way; it's a song about how the self, by identifying itself with other selves, can become a part of the great process of life.

Allen: I quite agree. The misunderstanding of Whitman's writing about himself, however, has caused him to be neglected by modern

critics to a great extent. The most important thing for us to do today, I think, is to understand that he was a great poet and to observe the ways in which he was a master of esthetic form.

Bryson: Not merely a half-achieved poet, but a *great* poet?

Allen: He was a great poet. Many failures, of course—but every major poet has many failures.

Bryson: Yes, and usually has enough sense to put them in the waste basket—which Whitman didn't.

Allen: That's quite true. Perhaps it's another one of the problems that the critics should deal with.

Daiches: Yes, it's a strange thing. I often wonder how we would think of Whitman today if he had done what most poets do—put into the waste basket all his failures or half-achieved poems. A lot of the patronizing attitude towards Whitman results from the fact that *Leaves of Grass*, in the form we have it, is his workshop as well as his final achievement. It has the shavings and the sawdust.

Bryson: It's perfectly easy to pick up *Leaves of Grass* and find on almost any page turgid, ridiculous, bad writing—not only bad poetry, just bad writing. If that's what you're looking for, you can find it there.

Daiches: That is, of course, true. On the other hand, I think Mr. Allen made a very good point when he remarked about the misconception of Whitman as simply a personal poet. Whitman at his best was a great artist, and he manipulated his ideas, his rhythms, his conception of himself, his poses, his mask—as Yeats called it—with deliberate cunning in order to achieve this very special kind of counterpointing of the individual and the democratic mass. That's what makes him such a unique sort of democratic poet, I think.

Bryson: Sometimes I think that Whitman is the more moving because his great passages come out of this waste. Whitman in a sense sneaks up on me. I'm reading something that seems dull and drab, a mere catalog, and all of a sudden he gets me by the throat; I'm not prepared for it, because it comes out of a kind of waste that he himself creates.

Allen: Perhaps that might be illustrated by the *Song of Myself*. In section 6 a child asks, "What is the grass?" Whitman gives not one but many answers, using metaphors: "The flag of my disposition," "the handkerchief of the Lord," "a uniform hieroglyphic," and then the magnificent passage in which it is "the beautiful uncut hair of graves." The grass becomes a universal symbol of rebirth—he is particularly good, I think, in his symbols of rebirth.

Daiches: I think that's one of the most fascinating things which the modern critical view can bring out in Whitman. We're all concerned today with the use of myths in great literature; we all know that in, say, T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* there is a deliberate exploitation of anthropological ideas uncovered by specific scholars like Jessie Weston and Sir James Frazer. Whitman used ideas similar to those which modern anthropology has discovered and discussed, but he used them with this air of autobiographical carelessness that so fascinates me. Nothing could be more unlike the strict, impersonal

way in which Eliot deploys his anthropological material in *The Waste Land* than Whitman's lyrical, personal way of handling very similar material—as though it's bubbling up carelessly when, of course, it isn't.

Allen: Actually, Whitman was very much interested in anthropology, although it wasn't called that at the time. He visited the Egyptian Museum in New York City time after time and wrote articles about it. He made great studies, in fact, of the myths of many lands; the Osiris myth comes out in many places in Whitman's poems, although I think he actually mentioned it only once.

Bryson: Isn't it necessary right at that point to nail down one of the myths about Whitman himself, which he was guilty of perpetuating—that he was a kind of rough, to use his word, that all he knew he got out of riding around on ferryboats and talking to bus drivers, who may be very worthy men but are not generally learned in anthropology? He disguised completely the fact that he spent, through his whole life, a great deal of his time reading, studying, going to the ordinary sources of information, and doing what he could to soak it up.

Allen: He has the most complex character I've ever studied. He did like ordinary men, he did like to ride around with bus drivers and to hobnob with workmen. At the same time he also had friends who were cultured and intellectual. That, as I see it, is one of the great paradoxes in Whitman's character. Perhaps you might even say in Whitman's art.

Daiches: I think also that that kind of paradox is illustrated by the curious relationship between a rough—he wasn't one, of course; he was much more like the ideal saint than the ideal tough guy, and the hair on his chest was much more like the flowing locks of the prophet than the Hemingway kind of hairiness. The most moving things in Whitman are gentle things—the gentle, perceptive observations in which, by fulfilling his own personality, he finds himself identified with someone else. "I am the man, I suffered, I was there." Like the Biblical suffering servants of Isaiah—in all their afflictions he was afflicted. It's Christlike, not tramplike at all.

Allen: I agree, except that there's one respect in which he was not a saint: he had no asceticism. In fact, he was a deadly anti-ascetic.

Bryson: That's just a greater kind of saintliness!

Allen: That may be. Perhaps we might illustrate some of this by talking about the poem *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry*. Whitman was very fond of riding the ferry. He enjoyed the crowds, he enjoyed the sensation of traveling; but in the poem the experience is transmuted again into a symbol. The ferry becomes a crossing of time, perhaps also a crossing of space. The immediate environment might not seem to be very poetic—the turbid water, the docks lining the shore—but Whitman saw it in terms that transcended time and space.

Bryson: And he wasn't merely going from home to work and back again. He was riding the ferries deliberately to seek poetic inspiration, wasn't he? He did it all his life. When he had to live in Camden, he went back and forth to Philadelphia by ferry.

Allen: That is correct.

Bryson: This shuttling on the river—what was it that gave him the feeling that this was symbolic of immortality?

Allen: I might give two or three examples. He mentions "the eternal float." Of course, the water is the float, but the float is likewise the symbol of something like Emerson's Oversoul, out of which all life emerges. He sees himself as having emerged from this eternal float.

Daiches: And a ferry, too, is what one might call a spacebinder, isn't it? Whitman always wanted to bring things together, time and space,—as in *Passage to India*, the great poem where the whole history of mankind and the whole of geographical space are focused in this great inclusive vision. A ferry is something which connects things; you go to and fro, connecting different worlds. I suppose, ultimately, one might see a connection between this life and the next, because Whitman saw life as a process, a sort of great cosmic dance in which everything fits. The flow between this life and the next is part of that continuity, which was one of his basic themes: life is continuous and flows and moves in a pattern.

Allen: He also makes a point in this poem that the arch is continuous, that it also transcends time and space.

Bryson: The poet is the person—I think you've said this, Mr. Allen, in your own book on Whitman—who does succeed in binding time and making man immortal. He does it for man.

Allen: That is quite true. In fact, I think one of the great points often overlooked—perhaps even distorted by Whitman himself—is that the poet out of the experience of the past projects himself into the future, and in that way combines past and future to make it present.

Bryson: He crosses Brooklyn Ferry and he also crosses the Pacific Ocean to India, but in his "spacebinding" was he indifferent to distance? Did he master space by paying no attention to these differences—is that part of it?

Daiches: Oh, the very reverse! Obviously, he was enthralled by the idea of American space. It was his response to the frontier tradition, to the vastness of the country, that produced those great "catalogs."

Allen: It was his way of bringing it all together.

Daiches: But the extraordinary thing is that in his successful poems he moves across space without leaving anything behind. He gathers it up as he goes along. I often think of that feeling we've all had so often—I used to have it as a child so vividly—of going in a train across country, getting a glimpse of a farmer standing with a horse, or a family in a backyard, and suddenly feeling that you want to project yourself into their life. There they are, we're leaving them behind, what are they doing? Well, Whitman doesn't leave them behind. He finds poetic techniques for embracing them. That's what he means, I think, when he says that the poet is the great lover, the man who manages to travel through vast areas of time and space but

never leaves anything behind. Somehow he manages to achieve this continuity.

Allen: He is also very successful, I think, in using an esthetic form to convey this transcending of time and space. I might say particularly space. The greatest example I can think of would be *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*. The funeral train actually started out from Washington, stopped in Philadelphia and New York and Buffalo, and finally arrived in Springfield, Illinois. In one section of the poem, he has the coffin passing "Through lanes and streets, through day and night with the great cloud darkening the land"; he keeps giving us this feeling of progression, progression, until at last in its serpentine way the coffin arrives at its destination.

Bryson: But how much of the feeling is there because that coffin contained the body of Lincoln?

Allen: That, of course, is partly the explanation.

Bryson: I don't mean in the lyric appeal of the poem—obviously, there's his very great love of Lincoln as a character and as a symbol of what he thought America could be; he was one of the first people, really, to understand Lincoln, I suppose. I don't mean just that, I mean in this spacebinding: how much of the tremendous force of that passage is due to the fact that he thought of this coffin as holding an immortal character?

Daiches: This immortal character was a symbol of the nation, and so it is poetically appropriate, as well as appropriate on the realistic level, that in the coffin's moving across the nation it symbolizes the nation's unity. You pick up the different elements and pull them together into a nation which is both proud and mournful; the two moods come together in an extraordinary way, it seems to me, in that poem.

Bryson: When you stop talking about *Cross Brooklyn Ferry* and start talking about the *Lilac* poem, you've moved from his spacebinding into his timebinding, haven't you? In both he's trying to give man mastery of his fate, but here he's thinking more of time than he is of space. Am I right about that?

Allen: That is correct. It's interesting, too, that in the *Lilac* poem he actually draws upon Egyptology. In one section he asks: "O what shall I hang on the chamber walls?" It's not exactly typically American to have a burial chamber, or to hang pictures on its walls. He must have been thinking about the hieroglyphics in the tombs of the Pharaohs—perhaps because to him Lincoln was a great leader, a great hero, such as the Pharaohs of ancient times.

Daiches: That's another case of the popular view of Whitman as being a man who, as he liked to say himself, owed nothing to books; this is so wrong.

Bryson: Of course, it's not only that he pretended to be ignorant and unread, when he was actually for a self-made man extraordinarily well read, but it's also the fact that he insisted on putting into his poems words which seem strangely out of place and even curiously spelled, which gave a kind of peripheral quality of ignorance. I think sometimes he must have done it deliberately.

Daiches: Yes, I think so. I often have the feeling that with these

strange, foreign—or supposedly foreign—words he was trying to assert the individuality of his vision by hitting on the startling word, the word that would shock the reader into attention. It's the shock of recognition—"Let's see America freshly." Wasn't one of his greatest ideas that one should look at things as they are? Everything can exist together in the whole cosmic process only if everything is true to himself, not faked, not "dandified"—one of his favorite terms of abuse. His insistence that he didn't owe anything to books was, I often think, simply a way of expressing his sense of the importance of a poet's having an original vision, not blindly following literary fashions or writing things because there was a public demand for them, but being true to what he saw.

Allen: That was in part due to the American nationalism of the period, I think. Americans wanted to cut loose from Europe and from the past. Emerson's *American Scholar* address demands that kind of freedom.

Bryson: And we were expanding at that time, too.

Allen: That also enters in, naturally. In that respect Whitman was representing his country as he hoped to . . .

Bryson: There's a surprising query at the end of your sentence there, Mr. Allen: are you questioning that Whitman really *did* represent his country?

Allen: There are ways in which he did and ways in which he didn't. Personally, I think his greatest achievements were really universal, as in *Out of the Cradle* or the *Lilac* poem.

Bryson: But that doesn't mean he didn't represent America?

Allen: He did *also* represent America, yet the theme is birth and death and resurrection, which is the theme of many great poems and the myths of all lands.

Daiches: Coming from the other side of the Atlantic, I can perhaps testify to that particularly. He used, it often seems to me, symbols of American democracy not in a simple, political way, but in a larger symbolic sense to indicate ways in which the human situation could, and should, be contemplated and handled by the poet's vision.

Bryson: One thing we seemed not to have talked very much about, which Whitman himself would have insisted on, is his doctrine that love, especially as expressed in the poetic personality, solves all problems. He constantly talks about love. He talks about love and sex as a force, but it's a force which solves problems—not only a force which binds men together, but which really brings them what they want.

Allen: He uses that in his patriotic poems, regards it as the one element, the one virtue, which may solve all problems. Hatred and antagonisms are corrosive socially. On the other hand, he also uses love in its broader sense so that he finally becomes a poet for all mankind. Perhaps that accounts for his reception in so many countries and lands.

Daiches: And there you get the interesting paradox of love—the outward movement towards other people, which at the same time is the fulfillment of the individual who loves. There's a very interesting

conflict of opinion there between Whitman and D. H. Lawrence, who, of course, much later wrote about Whitman very interestingly. Lawrence always felt that the difference between people was ultimate, and that real true love was the recognition of the mysterious "otherness" in the beloved. He castigated Whitman for not realizing that, but I think Whitman's vision was different. Whitman really believed that love was a way of getting inside other people. It was a way of identifying the Me with the not-Me, to use his own language, and it was perhaps a mystical view in the long run.

Allen: Highly mystical. As a matter of fact, I think Lawrence has a good point in saying that the criminal doesn't want sympathy; the person who is sick does not want sympathy, he wants to be healed, cured. Whitman wants to merge, he wants to take on himself vicariously the sins and the suffering of all mankind—whereas socially the important thing is to do something about those evils.

Bryson: I think it should be said in justice to Whitman (which you have amply done, Mr. Allen) that during the War Between the States, he put himself into action as an agent of love in the most self-sacrificing way—because isn't it true that Whitman's early paralysis was due partly to his extraordinary efforts on behalf of the wounded through years of service in hospitals?

Allen: Well, it certainly had an effect, although there are probably other things, too, that helped to bring it on. He was a person who analyzed himself a great deal. He worried a great deal. He was not, as a matter of fact, the nonchalant person in actuality that he liked to pose as being.

Bryson: But what I mean is that he was poverty-stricken through most of his life, even at the end, and yet when he had a chance to make his saintliness count at the bedside of his sick, he didn't hesitate. He was not the poet who sat aside and said what man ought to do; as far as he was able, he did it himself.

Daiches: I think that was one of the comparatively rare occasions, though, where the man and the pose came together.

Bryson: That's right. But those four or five years were a kind of culmination, or climax, in the character of Whitman—not artistically, but in the development of his character. What kind of apparatus did he have to achieve great poetry with this extraordinary scope of ideas and this extremely recalcitrant material? He tried to get everything in, and at the same time to express the highest and most difficult thoughts. That requires artistic resources of the greatest kind. Did he have them?

Allen: It is a misconception that he did not have them! Actually, he did. He had a great artistic sense. The very fact that he revised his poems so much shows that he was trying to get them into proper shape, to change the language, to change the rhythm.

Bryson: Well, you've got a paradox there. You mean he was good at revising although he was such a bad critic?

Allen: He was! He was better at revising than he was at selecting the good poems from the bad. He was not a very good critic of his own poems.

Bryson: That's one of the things about *Leaves of Grass*, of course, that one must note. He was always republishing the same book. It was always *Leaves of Grass*, except for *Drum Taps*—the same poems over and over again, bits of this poem taken out and put into that poem, and so on. Did this artistic excellence of his, which you insist on, show itself in the beginning?

Allen: Actually, it did. In the poem *Song of Myself* there are many passages which he later on changed but which have far more power and vigor, I think, in the first version than in the revisions.

Bryson: So this quality was a genuine quality, not merely the achievement of laborious talent? He had in the beginning the poet's touch?

Allen: Oh, he had a great gift from the very beginning. He kept on working at it and achieved improvement, although in his old age he perhaps lost some of it. Certainly he lost some of his vigor.

Daiches: I wonder whether Whitman's feeling for continuity—his almost mystical sense of time, life, death and immortality—is bound up in one continuous process? His desire never to leave anything behind, that I mentioned a moment ago—I wonder whether that isn't reflected in the way in which *Leaves of Grass* developed? I know of no parallel in the history of literature: this poet gathered everything up, rewrote it, expanded it, left nothing behind. All his life he was writing this one book; it was a great gathering up, a perpetual harvest growing always from the same seed.

Allen: It seems to me many of the poems grew out of an emotional turbulence; when Whitman could control that turbulence, he finally achieved an artistic form. When the turbulence was too great for him, he failed to achieve esthetic unity.

Bryson: Well, of course, that would be true of most poets, wouldn't it?

Allen: Quite true!

Bryson: Truer of the lyric poet in Whitman than of the epic poet in him. We ordinarily think of the epic poet as a man who has achieved a certain serenity by the distance from which he regards his material. Whitman regarded his epic material from the very midst of it, and I suppose turbulence would have been necessary and inevitable in that case.

Daiches: Yes! Only occasionally, in his happiest moments, did he completely subdue that turbulence. I always think, perhaps because I'm looking at it from the British point of view, that *Passage to India* is his most successful longer piece. There he starts off with the crossing of the American continent by railroad and the linking with the east through the Suez Canal; his own excitement about that mounts and mounts, moves outward and outward, until he gets a whole vision of time and space, human history, human geography, the cradle of the race in the Orient, and all of human achievement. It's a tremendous time- and spacebinding poem, which then passes beyond India and back to himself again. The poem ends after this cosmic vision with a challenge to the self to mystical adventure.

Allen: Whitman sought for companions all of his life. It's inter

esting, I think, that these companions remained elusive. He himself realized that he had not found them, and at last in *Passage to India* the companion he searches for is God and it finally becomes a religious poem. It's very fitting, I think, that in his old age he should have achieved this fleeting companionship with God.

Bryson: I suppose one ought to say that a hundred years is much too short a time to judge a work of this kind. It was Whitman's more personal and direct ambition to be *felt* by Americans as the great American poet. Perhaps we may finally come to that if we grow up to Whitman.

GEORGE MEREDITH

The Ordeal of Richard Feverel

(As broadcast February 20, 1955)

HELEN MAC INNES • DAN WICKENDEN • LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* seems to me in some ways to be the ordeal of a lot of people. Richard is only the chief victim of his father's—what shall I call it?—diabolic intelligence.

MacInnes: Yes, I think that's a very good description of it. This novel is a study of planned education. Sir Austin Feverel, by force of will and intellect, is convinced that science is the key to life—and Richard's life is to be planned and scientific. Of course, each stage of his development has its human failures, but Sir Austin reasserts his control over Richard . . .

Bryson: And wrecks him?

MacInnes: And eventually pushes him too far. No control is possible—and there's complete tragedy.

Bryson: Is Meredith saying here that if you try to plan life too definitely and too rationally, in this sense, it's bound to end in a smash?

MacInnes: I think so. In fact, Meredith himself says there is nothing like a theory for blinding the wise.

Wickenden: In fact, the novel might even be taken as a handbook on how not to bring up your son, how not to educate a human being, how not to tamper with a soul.

Bryson: I think I would say on behalf of the scientists that there are other ideas of science than the one Meredith seems to have had.

Wickenden: Oh, admittedly!

Bryson: And there are ways of planning education somewhat more intelligent than Sir Austin's, but Meredith sweeps you completely into his point of view with this story.

Wickenden: Yes, he does, although from my point of view Sir

Austin Feverel, Richard's father, is to some extent a slightly preposterous character. Of course, he's meant to be preposterous, but he is very real and very vivid. And when I began the book, I was not sure how I felt about him (I knew, of course, that he was being satirized). As the book went on, I came to dislike him more and more intensely until at the end I couldn't stand him. But he has great force because he is done so vividly.

MacInnes: Well, that's because he's given very good impulses.

Bryson: Also good ideas.

MacInnes: Many good ideas, and he keeps saying very wise things. Except that he has got this blind spot in him: he really believes that you can make a system out of life. Not so much by scientific teaching—it wasn't that. He was making a science of life itself—dividing the boy's life into certain periods, each of which would have its own special treatment, its own five-year plan, as it were. But you can't treat human beings as if they were machines. They just will not behave!

Wickenden: Perhaps the one trouble with Sir Austin is summed up in part of a sentence about him that struck me as I was reading the book: "A fine mind and a fine heart at the bounds of a nature not great." The fact that his nature, his instinctive side, was somewhat lacking or crippled, as we might say nowadays, meant that the fine mind and the fine heart went awry.

Bryson: I think that's letting him off too easily, because he inflicted his will upon this boy and upon other people with complete cruelty and ruthlessness. That's not lack of spirit—that's having too much of the wrong kind of spirit.

MacInnes: Well, he was a monomaniac; he became an absolute tyrant and more and more so, because all power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. There is the point, too, that he had a liking, to begin with, which seemed perfectly harmless: he had a liking for going against accepted opinion.

Bryson: Well, there you are. You've got a picture of the fanatic. What kind of apparatus does Meredith use, what kind of story does he tell, in order to take this boy through the various phases of his father's plan to his final tragedy? I'm not sure it is a tragedy for the father, because he doesn't seem to have learned anything even at the end.

Wickenden: That's the tragedy, of course—his being so deeply wrong.

MacInnes: I'm sure he just went on believing that his system was perfect, but that Richard, alas, was not the perfect subject for his experiment.

Bryson: I wonder a little about that. There are various points in the book, especially toward the end—when it becomes an outright tragedy—where Sir Austin seems at least a little shaken, where he begins to doubt himself. Now, how would you tell the story in two words?

MacInnes: Two words?

Bryson: I'll give you twenty.

MacInnes: Very well: Richard is given beautiful surroundings, a life of wealth, culture, education, especially chosen companions and tutors, and his father thinks that will achieve happiness for him by the time he's twenty-one and reaches manhood. Richard is a human little boy and so there are revolts, which his father is quite cruel at putting down. Not physically cruel, oh no, but he wouldn't send Richard to school, because at school Richard might get beaten and that would only make him coarse and vulgar. He was cruel by using ridicule, by making Richard feel dreadful when he had been too exuberant or had written some poetry—of course, he ought never to have done *that*, considering that his mother had deserted Sir Austin when Richard was only a baby and had run away with a poet.

Bryson: Making Sir Austin hate both women and poets!

MacInnes: Exactly, and that is rather important to the whole thing. Well, this whole System, spelled with a capital S, is quite a terrifying thing to watch. The boy is eventually supposed to fall in love—no, *not* fall in love, but marry someone suitable chosen by Sir Austin. But the boy himself has met Lucy, and all Sir Austin's little plans . . .

Bryson: Can you describe Lucy, Miss MacInnes?

MacInnes: She's a sweet and enchanting girl.

Wickenden: One of Meredith's powers, for which he was famous, I think, throughout his writing career, was his great ability to describe beautiful women. It is not an easy thing for a novelist to convince his readers that a woman is beautiful and charming and . . .

Bryson: And simple.

Wickenden: Lucy is not just a ninny, she is an enchanting creature!

Bryson: But completely without a *plan*.

Wickenden: Yes.

Bryson: She's just life itself, she's just sweetness and loveliness itself, but she doesn't come up to Sir Austin's idea of what his son ought to marry at all. All right now, what happened?

MacInnes: Well, that's the delightful irony of the situation, because Lucy is the niece of Blaize, the local farmer, and is just the kind of girl Sir Austin painted a picture of when he was describing the wife he wanted Richard to have some day.

Bryson: But *he* wouldn't expect to find her on a neighboring farm.

MacInnes: No. He was off in London. With the help of a doctor, a nurse, and solicitor, he was going around looking at well brought up little girls, aged nine or ten, to see if one might possibly be the right girl, in the future, for Richard.

Wickenden: And, of course, that very thing is an illustration of the kind of irony, the kind of satire, that we get in Meredith.

MacInnes: All through the novel there's this biting wit. Meredith shows you how ridiculous and how pompous people are when they're so convinced they're completely right.

Bryson: But, after all, what we've told of the story thus far is really just a sort of preparation for what happens.

MacInnes: That's really how the book is constructed, isn't it? The first chapters explain the whole foundation of how a boy, suddenly, at the age of eighteen, falls in love in spite of his father and, having the natural good sense to choose a really wonderful girl, will not give her up. He seems at first to do so, when his father moves into high gear and has Lucy taken away and sent off to school, but the boy doesn't give in and eventually runs away with her, marries her, and there we are.

Bryson: Yes, there we are. Now things are going down-hill with respect to the System. We've had it explained: the distrust of women, the distrust of poetry, this idea that you can make a life scientific. Nature, using that in its broadest philosophic sense, sort of breaks through: the boy finds a marvelous girl and marries her, the father starts to break it up, and then tragedy sets in.

Wickenden: You might sum up what happens in the System by saying that Sir Austin has isolated Richard from any contact with reality, with the real world . . .

Bryson: And with women!

Wickenden: Well, they're part of reality.

Bryson: I wanted to be quite sure they got in—because it's Richard's isolation from women that really makes the tragedy; that's why the System is so bad.

MacInnes: Yes, the great seat of tragedy in this is that Sir Austin, talking so nobly about good and evil, has made a terrible mistake: the good man is not necessarily a virtuous man. Virtue comes only when you are faced with some temptation. It's easy to be good if nothing's there to tempt you; but when a man is really virtuous, he is good in spite of temptation.

Wickenden: And poor Richard has never had temptation, except in an early episode of the book.

Bryson: But the temptation doesn't come from Lucy; he marries her, and is very happy with her until his father moves in with a club.

MacInnes: Well, his father is still, you know—did you notice? this is very clever of Meredith—his father is still keeping on with the System. His father had decided the early years up to age of fourteen should be "simple boyhood." The next was called, in the father's rather whimsical phrase, the "blossoming season." Then there was to be the "magnetic age"—not my phrase. The magnetic age was about the age of eighteen, where the boy was to be kept away from all . . .

Wickenden: From all "magnets"!

MacInnes: Exactly! And that failed when the boy went and got married and ran away to the Isle of Wight with Lucy. The next period which the father set up for the son was to be called the "period of probation," which I gather was to be from the age of eighteen to twenty-one; and twenty-one was the "age of manhood." Well, although the system didn't work with Richard the way the father intended it, he's still so struck with his theory that he brings Richard back to London in the hope of a reconciliation and a meeting. He

keeps him hanging around London, and the only way to explain it is that he's trying a period of probation.

Bryson: Yes, but Richard is actually separated from his wife.

Wickenden: That's one of the great tragedies of the book, but it was also one of the things that I had some difficulty in swallowing. Perhaps because I was so enchanted by Lucy myself, I couldn't understand—one gets awfully impatient with Richard—why, despite all his scruples, he stays away from Lucy so long. Unless the author is perversely keeping him away, just so he can work up to his final tragedy. I do think there is an arbitrary element in the plotting of this book.

Bryson: And Meredith was rubbing it in. But just the same, Richard Feverel *was* the result of the System in some measure—in his spiritual dependence on his father. Nature broke out in him: he found this lovely creature, he married her, he left his father's influence, but his father still had him; the spiritual power of his father over him was still there. Richard never was a man, never in this whole book!

Wickenden: No, of course, and he was extremely young—eighteen or nineteen—when he married Lucy.

Bryson: He was just a boy. But I mean that he never showed the kind of manhood and independence which his father thought he was building in him.

MacInnes: Whenever he did show it naturally, his father would immediately take steps to end it.

Bryson: The ordeal of Richard Feverel isn't over yet. Now what happens? He's been separated from his wife whom he loves.

MacInnes: Taken to dwell in London—and there I must say that I think Lucy did not have to stay in the Isle of Wight; I think there she showed a certain sign of weakness.

Wickenden: Don't say anything against Lucy!

Bryson: I have nothing but complete sympathy for Lucy. I'm sure she behaved just as she would have.

MacInnes: Well, Richard is in London because he's been given to understand that his father might meet him here—they would have this meeting of forgiveness—and he does want his father to meet Lucy; he knows he would like her if only he would meet her, and everything would be happy. Then they could all go on living at Raynham Abbey, and the family would be united. Richard had been brought up in a very tight family group and that's his idea of how to live, I think. Well, the father doesn't come. As I say, in his own mind, he's still putting Richard through this period of probation. The result is that poor Richard is away from Lucy and becomes the victim of another plot—a sub-plot, rather—in the Isle of Wight. A Lord Mountfalcon has fallen in love with Lucy, and he offers to pay—I don't know whether it's his separated wife or his mistress, but she's called Mrs. Mount . . .

Wickenden: It is never made quite clear.

MacInnes: Well, Mrs. Mount, a dashing, beautiful creature who lives in London, surrounded by guardsmen and all kinds of very

flashy courtiers—Mrs. Mount is to have her bills paid, which are quite considerable, and to be set up very comfortably if she will seduce Richard.

Bryson: Lord Mountfalcon thinks that if Richard can be seduced, it will break up Richard's marriage and he can get Lucy for himself.

Wickenden: He *wouldn't* get her, of course. In a sense the book becomes melodramatic here, except that the chapter in which Richard is seduced by Mrs. Mount is an extraordinary piece of writing. It's one of the most powerful chapters in the book; it has a dream-like intensity and, in a sense, I think nothing more emotional, more powerful in its own way, exists in any current novel.

MacInnes: And a wonderful parallel to the quite other love scene with Lucy, when they first meet on the banks of the Thames—two completely different kinds of love, both beautifully done, both done in different ways.

Bryson: Meredith is really saying here, isn't he, that this boy hadn't been prepared, and can resist neither sacred nor profane love? He succumbs to both, because he doesn't know how to take care of himself.

MacInnes: Do you recall how the poor boy succumbed to profane love, as you call it, Mr. Bryson? Mrs. Mount was a most clever woman. She knew he had this do-good spirit in him, because his father had said "Be virtuous, and then do your best." Be virtuous, you see—not knowing the meaning of virtue, thinking "be virtuous" is the same as "be good," in an insulated way.

Bryson: Yes.

MacInnes: Well, the poor boy did have a kind of "do-good" tendency in him, he did want to help people; and Mrs. Mount was clever—she gave him the impression that she had been misunderstood, that she was a very fine woman, a generous woman, and as it turned out, she wasn't such a mean old thing, either. She was a wild-living but generous-hearted creature, and Richard thought that he could somehow get her away from this terrible life of cards, games, gambling and loose living.

Bryson: Such innocence of the world!

MacInnes: Yes, and I wondered at that moment—now you're going to jump on me, both of you, I know—but I wondered if Lucy's complete sweetness hadn't begun to just, well, pall a bit, like too many meringues.

Wickenden: No, no, not Lucy! Lucy is *not* a meringue kind of girl.

Bryson: You can be unjust to Meredith if you want to, Miss MacInnes; Mr. Wickenden and I will forgive you. But you *can't* be unjust to Lucy. And this, suddenly, now ceases to be funny—I mean the book ceases to be funny. The shadows really begin to come in now; the boy's broken-hearted because he has betrayed Lucy.

MacInnes: And because of his upbringing, again, he feels he never could face Lucy—he doesn't know the meaning of explanation or understand the forgiveness of such a nature; and so he goes away to

the Continent, and it looks as if he's abandoned Lucy. Now the odd thing is that Sir Austin and all that large gang of titled relatives, who had been against Lucy because she was the farmer's niece, suddenly are so horrified by Mrs. Mount that they accept Lucy when she is brought to them.

Bryson: At least they take her in.

MacInnes: They take her in and gradually get to like her.

Bryson: But they don't bring Richard back to her.

MacInnes: No, they don't, because they don't know how to approach him. Everything is cut off between Richard and his father.

Wickenden: But I think in justice to Sir Austin—who, as I say, is not my favorite character in all literature—when he finally is confronted with Lucy and her baby son, he is more or less, in his own way, as far as he's able, convinced that Richard hasn't done too badly after all. Isn't that so?

MacInnes: And I am terrified by the prospect of his having a new little boy to try his System on.

Bryson: Yes. But now we have the brutal fact—and I don't know of any other in great fiction which has ever seemed to me so brutal—that Lucy, cut off from her husband whom she loves, is allowed to die. And here's Richard—he has the baby, he's lost his wife, life has no meaning for him, and his father's still there; what happens then?

Wickenden: That, of course, is where the last page of the book leaves us—wondering just that. It is a tribute to the power of the book, to the reality of its characters, that we go on speculating about them after that final page. What is to become of that poor little baby? Has Sir Austin himself really learned anything? Will Richard really grow up into manhood after the ordeal he's been through? What will the education of little Richard be? I still wonder about that.

Bryson: Well, do you think that Sir Austin has learned anything?

Wickenden: I'm rather afraid not. As I say, there are points in the book where he appears a little shaken. One element of the plot we haven't mentioned: there is another enchanting woman—this book is full of interesting women—named Lady Blandish, who is a great friend of Sir Austin's, and who through a large part of the book hopes that he will eventually marry her. In a way, she maneuvers him into a sort of proposal . . .

Bryson: That's one flaw in her intelligence: she wants to marry him.

Wickenden: Yes, exactly!

Bryson: . . . and I don't think it's just his fifty thousand pounds she's interested in.

Wickenden: She's a highly intelligent woman, and being intelligent, she gets on to Sir Austin in the course of the novel; she winds up completely disillusioned and wouldn't marry him for anything by the time the book has ended.

Bryson: Do you think *he's* learned anything?

MacInnes: I don't think Meredith ever expected him to learn anything, because his mind was just too filled with theories. As soon as he had got rid of one theory, he would develop it into something else, and be blinded again. This intense monomania of his, this self-righteousness, this belief that human beings can really be controlled and that one can be some kind of a dictator over emotions—no, that kind of man doesn't learn. But I think that this abrupt end is very interesting in the novel. I really feel that Meredith himself, when he came to this spot, was overcome by Lucy's death and the fact that here was this young man, her husband, lying wounded, ill, his life completely empty, in what was supposed to be his flowering age. Well, there he is, the picture of despair, with absolutely nothing to think of but his guilt and his father's guilt. I think there's a great deal of irony in that, considering how often, in the earlier part of the book, the father had talked of this ultimate period of a young man's development as being the greatest one.

Wickenden: Very, very savage irony. As I say, I myself got to dislike Sir Austin more and more, and my feeling is that Meredith wound up by detesting Sir Austin more than he had when he first conceived the book and the character.

Bryson: Perhaps.

Wickenden: And I did a little resent it. I thought Meredith was piling things on a bit thick, at the end; I don't think it had to be quite that startling, that tragic.

MacInnes: There's this difficulty, of course—that this novel, until almost the last two pages, has been on the whole a comedy; the form of it is comedy.

Wickenden: A satirical comedy with poetic overtones.

MacInnes: And suddenly, in one page, almost the *last* page, it's complete tragedy.

Wickenden: Yes, but for that very reason, I think, this tragic ending has tremendous impact.

Bryson: Well, it has impact, but I'm not sure it makes the point; it just sort of upsets you.

MacInnes: It twists you around, it jolts your spine.

Bryson: I remember your saying, Mr. Wickenden, that Meredith really began an intellectual novel, a novel in which the structure is used to make a philosophical point. Perhaps at the end, after having made his point as the great structural innovator that he was, the poet in him broke through.

Wickenden: Perhaps that is so. Of course, this was his first official novel, as such, and he had a great deal to learn. He was only thirty or so when it was written, and twenty years were to pass before he wrote *The Egoist*, which in my opinion is his greatest novel. I think Miss MacInnes disagrees with me there.

MacInnes: I love *The Shaving of Shagpat* just as much as anything.

Bryson: You and Meredith are about the only people who ever did! But go ahead, Mr. Wickenden.

Wickenden: I think it was partly because *The Ordeal* was pub-

lished the same year as *A Tale of Two Cities*. In other words, although Meredith was a late Victorian, he began writing in the heyday of the Victorian novel, and I think he hadn't learned how to get rid of some of the conventions of the Victorian novel at the time he wrote this first one. He did get rid of them when he reached his full maturity in his later novels. *The Egoist*, for instance, is entirely on the plane of comedy, but this one is a strange blend of comedy and satire and very lovely poetry and melodrama and a starkly tragic ending. I think it is not quite all of a piece.

MacInnes: I think that in his later novels he might just as well have stopped being a novelist and become a poet-philosopher. He was a poet, essentially—a magnificent poet.

Bryson: But a philosophic poet.

MacInnes: He had a wonderful philosophy of life. His own philosophy was the very antithesis of Sir Austin's; that's maybe the reason why he seems to have hated Sir Austin so much.

Bryson: But he was also an intellectual who satirized intellectuals.

MacInnes: Yes, and he had great courage. He believed, you see, that everyone ought to look at himself absolutely honestly. And he felt, too, that the intellect is important, but not intellect without the character which is developed naturally by facing life's problems honestly.

Bryson: And if anybody ever told you not to read Meredith because he's "too intellectual," this is the book to begin with.

SCHOPENHAUER

The World as Will and Idea

(As broadcast February 27, 1955)

CHARLES FRANKEL • MARY MOTHERSILL • LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: Schopenhauer seems to be more the philosopher of the man-in-the-street, of the general reader, than he is of the teachers and practitioners of philosophy. I suppose that's partly because he was a great writer, and also because it's so easy for the man-in-the-street to grasp the fact that Schopenhauer has a very definite moral character as a philosopher.

Frankel: Schopenhauer speaks as very few philosophers, unfortunately, do—as a soliloquist. He speaks out of his own heart, and what he finds in his heart is enough like what other people find in their hearts to make it immediately communicable.

Bryson: Not a gay heart, is it?

Frankel: No. Schopenhauer, of course, goes all the way with a mood. He expresses pessimism as I think no other philosopher in the west has expressed it. In fact, he expresses it so extremely that in the end he has to go to eastern philosophy to find the words to express his view.

Mothersill: I think that Schopenhauer is sometimes regarded as a pessimist in a rather derogatory sense, which seems to me a pity, really.

Bryson: Well, now, can you use "pessimism" in America *except* in a derogatory sense?

Mothersill: No, I suppose not. But, really, this question of whether pessimism is or is not the right kind of philosophy depends on the kind of grounds that you provide for it. It seems to me that Schopenhauer gives very good reasons for being pessimistic. His whole analysis of human experience and human life provides the basis for making his pessimism not a kind of superficial gloominess, which is the way I think people tend to regard it, but as a very profound insight into the character of human experience.

Bryson: You mean you're *convinced*, Miss Mothersill?

Mothersill: Oh, yes! I think Schopenhauer is one of the great philosophers of the western world, and I object very much to the way in which he's thought of as a kind of crotchety and cantankerous and peculiar man. That just reflects the kind of thing that he most objected to in human beings.

Frankel: Just the same, don't you think he's a sort of cosmic grouch?

Mothersill: No, No! I find him certainly not optimistic, but expressing a kind of joy, a kind of healthy objectivity in the face of nature which I think is wonderful.

Bryson: Do you think this pessimism, then, is a brave declaration of accepting the world as it is? Horrible as he thinks the world is, he still says, "Well, this is the way it is and so my mind will understand it." Is it that?

Mothersill: If you're talking about pessimism, you need to distinguish two things. One is simply an attitude, a sort of negative feeling about the world. Now, Schopenhauer doesn't have a negative attitude toward the world, but a very positive one. The other sense of pessimism is that it's a belief about the world, a belief that somehow the world has more evil, more suffering, than it has good. In that sense, Schopenhauer very clearly is a pessimist, and on that level I think he can be defended.

Bryson: Oh, he's more of a pessimist than that! He doesn't say there's more evil in the world than good—he says the essential nature of the universe is evil.

Mothersill: No, I don't think so. He says that the essential nature of the world, what he means by the will. . .

Bryson: And now we're getting into his system, aren't we?

Mothersill: Yes. The force which lies beyond what he calls "the kernel of nature" is the will. This is something which transcends the concepts of science. It's not evil, but it's bound to be frustrated. The will is a kind of striving which expresses itself, for example, in the

law of gravitation—the apple that falls to the ground, the way the planets move—and also in animal and vegetable life.

Frankel: But it's more than that. Whenever apples fall to the ground, they fall on people's heads. What he means is that nature *objects* to the human will: nature fights human beings. No one wants to be a cosmic optimist and say the world is our oyster, but, on the other hand, to say that everything is a conspiracy against us is going a bit too far, don't you think?

Mothersill: I don't think one should read this kind of cosmic paranoia into Schopenhauer. He doesn't ever say that nature is *against* human beings. He says that nature is the natural world, together with you, me, and everyone engaged in this terrible struggle for survival. I think the real kernel of his pessimism is the fact of death—that whatever we do, the worst thing that can happen to us is bound to happen: that is, we die.

Bryson: Well, I don't know whether I accept his pessimism or not. It seems a little strange that we should all agree on how clear and powerful a writer he is, and then disagree as to what he said; I think that might shock Mr. Schopenhauer, but it's the fate of philosophers, isn't it? Let's consider this completely pervasive force in the world, which he calls the will, which is in everything. The stone falling from the cliff, human beings pursuing all of their purposes, mental, physical, and otherwise—everything that moves in the world is an expression of this thing he calls the will. It doesn't mean a conscious will; it isn't the conscious will of man against nature, it's a pervasive force in nature of which man is a part. But he says it is desire, and desire must be frustrated or satisfied. If it's satisfied you get bored; if it's frustrated you get unhappiness. It seems that the will turns out to be an evil thing. What else would you call it?

Mothersill: Well, since it's necessary and since it's the essential reality of the world, things become good and evil only in relation to the will. That is, in Schopenhauer's metaphysical view the will is ultimate—so that all value categories, all good and evil, are measured in terms of the will itself.

Frankel: And since the will can never be satisfied, all things are therefore evil, from the point of view of the will. Furthermore, calling all things will—the movement of the stone, the growth of a plant, all these things—is a device for reading nature in human terms. After all, calling gravitation an act of will is pushing things pretty far.

Bryson: Do you think it's just poetry, Mr. Frankel?

Frankel: Very good poetry!

Bryson: Just poetry, though?

Frankel: I don't think it's what Schopenhauer pretends it to be. I think he is reading his own mood into the world.

Mothersill: Well, now, what's the objection to that?

Frankel: To read his own mood into the world? Fine—as long as one honestly admits one is doing that.

Mothersill: Ah, but certainly Schopenhauer is very honest about that! He says if you want to know what the rest of the world is like, what have you got to go on? Only your own experience. And he uses

the word "projection." He says "I understand other people, I understand other things by knowing what I myself feel." So whether or not this is valuable, it certainly isn't disingenuous. He's very clear about what he's doing.

Frankel: No, he's not. He's very, very honest at the beginning, but I think he's taken in at the end. When one projects one's own feelings onto the world, most normal people know that one sometimes makes mistakes.

Mothersill: But that's only if they're trying to use this kind of analogy as a basis of explanation. And that's animistic, that's superstition.

Bryson: Do you mean that Schopenhauer doesn't use this as an explanation of nature?

Mothersill: No! He's very clear about that. He says that if you want to know why things happen, you study science—because science gives you the causal laws in natural phenomena. But he adds: "My purpose is not to tell the why of the world, but the what of the world." So he doesn't use the notion of the will as an explanatory principle. If he did, then I would agree with you, Mr. Frankel, that he would be very likely to make mistakes. He doesn't make mistakes, because he doesn't give any explanation.

Bryson: I think it's awfully easy to be confused here by the common usage of words like "explanation" and "the why" and "the what," isn't it? Ordinarily, the contrast is made between science, which tells *what*, and philosophy, which tells *why*. He just reverses them.

Mothersill: I think that's true. But Schopenhauer is very sophisticated about science; he was well up on the science of his own day. Be believed, and I think he's quite right, that the job of science is to describe and explain natural phenomena.

Bryson: But "explain" only in the sense of showing how cause and effect make for continuous change; he didn't expect it to explain the beginnings of things.

Mothersill: Well, it's not that you don't get the beginnings, but when you're all through you still have questions. Schopenhauer seems to me to be a great philosopher partly because he recognizes the fact that people do have questions. There's a wonderful passage in the first book of "*The World as Will and Idea*" where he gives this illustration: I'm suddenly introduced into a room full of people and I don't know who any of them are; each one introduces another to me as his cousin, and I find that they're all related—but still, at the end, I'm left with the question, "How in the world do I stand to all of them?" Now this, he says, is the position of man in relation to the sciences. You learn that biology is related to physics and when you get through you think, "But what's it all about? Who am I? What's the meaning of it all?"

Frankel: One can ask "What does it mean to me?" But Schopenhauer doesn't quite do that. When he's all through looking at the sciences, he says, "Ah, but they're subjective"; and then he turns things upside down and says that if you really want to know what

the world indelibly and indubitably is, turn to the one thing you cannot doubt—the strivings of your own will. What kind of will is it? Look at it very carefully and then read out the world from it. Now, I have my doubts about that. In the first place, I don't think you can move from your own animate soul to the rest of the world, and in the second place my will is, fortunately or unfortunately—I think fortunately—not at all like Schopenhauer's or not enough like it to be completely convinced.

Mothersill: I agree with you to this extent: that when it comes to psychology, Schopenhauer fails to take account of ordinary, everyday pleasures and satisfactions. . . .

Bryson: That's health, though, isn't it?

Mothersill: That's health, and Schopenhauer certainly was not a healthy individual; the scars of his own misfortunes appear in his work. I think, though, that even Mr. Frankel would have to grant this: that if you think of human life as a whole, you really must eventually agree with Schopenhauer when he says that the essence of life is suffering.

Frankel: Oh, there's certainly an overwhelming proportion of suffering as compared to joy, but that's not the essence of life, is it?

Mothersill: Well, I'd like to read a quotation here which will give you an idea of how he puts it; I think it also conveys the main point, which, as I said before, seems to me to be the fact of death. He says: "The life of the great majority is only a constant struggle for this existence itself, with the certainty of losing it in the end. But what enables them to continue is not love of life but fear of death. Life is a sea, full of rocks and whirlpools, which man avoids with the greatest care and solicitude, although he knows that even if he succeeds in getting through, yet by so doing he comes nearer at every step to the greatest, the total, the inevitable and irremediable shipwreck, death, may even steers right upon it; this is the final goal of the laborious voyage and worse for him than all the rocks from which he has escaped."

Frankel: I've often taken trips to very hopeful destinations, and when I've come there found them to be desolate and disappointing. Nevertheless, the trips themselves haven't always been disappointing. Look at where I've been, look at what I've seen along the way! I do find your explanation unconvincing, because what I think Schopenhauer is really complaining about, what he's discovered or at any rate made a great deal of, is the ongoing character of will: the will never stops; our desires are never fully satisfied; every minor satisfaction is a taking-off place for something else; there is no ultimate goal to human life, no final end, save death. But it seems to me that there are all sorts of pauses, of moments when we are alert, moments when we are joyful, moments when we simply feel good. More than that, the will fixes itself on objects—and when it fixes itself on objects, you have affection, love, good meals, a good wife, good children. These things are all very good cures for pessimism.

Bryson: Let me call attention to the fact that will is only half of Schopenhauer's description of the universe. After all, it's the world

as will *and* as idea. Where does idea come into this? The will is the ultimate impulse that moves all things, the motion in the world. Now, what's idea?

Mothersill: Schopenhauer says that the will expresses itself in every form of physical reality from rocks and stones, which he calls the lowest level of the will, to human beings, which are the highest level. Now, each of these levels has its own idea, its own prototype. . .

Bryson: Is this where Plato's ideas come in?

Mothersill: That's right. This is a borrowing from Plato. But to go back to Mr. Frankel's last point: I want to say that it seems to me that no one has been as clear as Schopenhauer in pointing out the value of the moments of release from the striving of human endeavor.

Frankel: Yes, but to take art as release or escape is only one way of taking it. One can also take it as achievement, as a fulfilment of the possibilities of ordinary experience.

Bryson: Don't most optimists say that the striving in itself is worthwhile, whether we win or not? Isn't that really the difference between an optimist and a pessimist?

Frankel: Well, I'm defending optimism.

Bryson: I know you are.

Frankel: I'm defending ordinary good sense, I think.

Bryson: When Schopenhauer says that the end of all striving, no matter what happens on the journey, is frustration or death. . .

Frankel: It's an end.

Bryson: It's an end. But when he says on that account life is essentially evil—I should think "evil" is the only word you can use; at any rate, life is essentially a defeat for the human spirit—when he says that, he does give us an escape, and it's an escape through art. I think that's surprising.

Mothersill: Yes. For Schopenhauer it's true that art is an escape, but not in the sense that one might escape by getting drunk or going to sleep or even having some kind of mystical intuition. Art is an escape because it's a kind of vision. In art we see the will objectified. And with this kind of objectivity we don't escape; we transcend the suffering of the will.

Bryson: These are philosophical terms, of course, and yet Schopenhauer means a great deal to the ordinary reader. How, using those philosophic terms, has he conveyed to the reader that art is a way of transcending the essential difficulties or the essential frustrations or the essential defeat of life?

Mothersill: He thinks that in art, and particularly in music—his analysis of music, by the way, is really one of the best things of its kind that's ever been done—we are able to stand back from the struggle a bit and see it whole; that is, life, instead of being a battleground, becomes a kind of vista that we can appreciate and see for itself.

Frankel: I think you might also try to put it this way: the will ordinarily realizes itself in common everyday life by a series of compromises. Will breaks up: it's your will, my will. It has to give in here and make way there. Accidents surround it. The cosmic will—

the will of the universe—takes many forms, there are many objects which it might fulfill but never does quite realize. In art we see what will might do, if it were free from circumstance, free from time and place, free from compromise. We see will at its purest, and we therefore see it reaching a kind of temporary finality, if you can use that expression. For the moment the will is satisfied. It's a vicarious, fictive satisfaction but it's very real.

Bryson: The only one possible.

Frankel: Except for mysticism.

Bryson: Yes, but he rejects that. This is the only one possible because it succeeds and it does not lead to boredom.

Frankel: That's right.

Bryson: In every other type of success, the moment you get what you're after, you either start wanting something else or you're bored with the fact that you no longer want anything.

Mothersill: Yes, but this is part of what I would call the diagnostic portion of Schopenhauer's philosophy. His ethical theory, his moral point of view—which seems to me, next to his esthetics, perhaps the best he has to offer us—is something we've neglected so far in this discussion. This realization that will is essential in nature—in other words, that a kind of unfulfilled striving is the basis of experience—is not purely negative; because it's only when we realize that other people are victims of the same fate as we are, that we're able to transcend our own egoism, that we're able to feel that other people are somehow united with us. This, he says—and, I think, quite correctly—is the basis of all moral value.

Frankel: Miss Mothersill, while you've been talking one thing has been plaguing me—as a matter of fact it has been all through this conversation—and it's this: here I am, attacking Schopenhauer, and you, the lady in the discussion, are defending him.

Bryson: Which would have shocked Schopenhauer.

Frankel: It would have made him very uncomfortable.

Bryson: I think he would have rejected you out of hand. He wouldn't want to be defended by a woman.

Frankel: One of the examples he uses to show that the world is a cosmic conspiracy against man is just the existence of woman. Now, what are you going to say about that?

Mothersill: Well, Schopenhauer on women . . . it's like the generalizations he makes about other groups of people. If you want to be really pedantic about it, he's probably wrong. You remember what he says—that women have no real intelligence; all they have is a kind of low cunning, but it's enough to entrap men just long enough to insure that life, this tragic farce, will continue. One has the feeling it's a little overstated.

Frankel: You mean that women are smarter than men? That's not overstated!

Bryson: Yes, they have a high cunning, not a low cunning.

Mothersill: At the same time, I think the reason that people are sometimes angered by this idea of Schopenhauer's is that, while it's false, it's not completely false. There's a grain of truth in it. And I

think that's true with a great many of the things that one might object to as being overstated or, as you said, Mr. Frankel, a little strained. There usually is a grain of truth and usually it's an important one.

Bryson: But isn't his low opinion of women just part of the pattern of his own history? After all, part of the neuroticism—you can't call him actually neurotic, I suppose. . .

Mothersill: Oh, I think he was!

Bryson: Well, all right; part of that gloomy mood which was so lifelong with Schopenhauer came from the fact that he had a father who was probably psychopathic—certainly a badly neurotic father—and a pretty worthless mother. . .

Mothersill: His mother was terrible.

Bryson: . . . Whom he quarreled with and who finally threw him out.

Frankel: Threw him down the stairs.

Bryson: Down the stairs, because he was too censorious about her behavior and she didn't like his philosophizing. After all, one commentator on Schopenhauer says the trouble with him is that he never in his whole life loved anything except possibly his little dog.

Frankel: And I think this shows in his view of the will.

Bryson: Not loving anything, he couldn't very well have the attitude toward the world which we ordinarily call simple healthy acceptance of the powers and energies that are in us for expression.

Mothersill: He really had a perfectly wretched life, from the time he was very young; there were years and years and years when he had no acceptance at all. You know, he finally got a teaching job at the University of Berlin.

Bryson: But in Germany at that time they didn't like philosophers who were intelligible!

Mothersill: No, Hegel and Schleiermacher were the big boys then. He made the mistake of scheduling his lectures at the same hour as Hegel's, and nobody came to Schopenhauer's lectures.

Frankel: But I have a feeling he did it on purpose.

Mothersill: Of course he did it on purpose!

Bryson: Well, this perverseness in him is endearing. It isn't repellent.

Mothersill: I think the amazing thing is that he wasn't more neurotic than he was. The fact that he held together at all is surprising. But the second thing which I think is important is that it seems to me very essential not to confuse a man's own unhappy experience with his work.

Frankel: Yes, I agree completely.

Mothersill: And his work to me represents a great triumph over the limitations of his own neurosis. After all, to be neurotic is to be subjective and narrow, but Schopenhauer gives this tremendous feeling of health and vitality in his work; it's one of the greatest things about him, and it makes him the most fun to read.

Frankel: Yes, at times he's almost a wit.

Mothersill: He's very funny.

Frankel: And sometimes when he's at his most serious he's funniest. I don't say that to criticize him, but rather because he's a master of paradox. He seems to me to be the kind of man who takes a mood and offers you a sort of test of it: let's see how far you can go with this mood; let's see how the world looks if you stay perpetually in a blue mood.

Bryson: After all, he was only thirty when he wrote this book, and he hadn't read the eastern philosophies yet.

Mothersill: It's an amazing achievement.

Bryson: It's characteristic of a certain type of philosopher. A lot of them wrote their great books when they were very young; we always forget that philosophy and lyric poetry have that in common. But in the supplements he wrote later, he seems to think that Oriental philosophy is just a confirmation and a support of everything he ever said. Is that just a pose? Do you think he really thought the Upanishads, for example, were the final wisdom of the world?

Frankel: I see no reason to doubt that he thought so. It is, however, notable of many western philosophers that when they think they've got something really original to say, something radical that breaks with the tradition, they always manage to find it in the Orient. I have talked with one or two Oriental philosophers about this, and they report that they very rarely find in Oriental philosophy what westerners do. But, of course, I just don't know. I think he was honest when he said he really had found it in Indian philosophy.

Bryson: His acceptance of a kind of denial of the will, which he said was a solution of the problem, comes very close, I should say, to the Buddhist way of thinking: you deny the will, you stop the force. Art will help you to do it, ethics will help you to do it.

Mothersill: And asceticism, that was very important for Schopenhauer—a kind of repression of desire.

Bryson: Which is *not* Buddhistic!

Frankel: What he means is very clearly brought out in his distinction between denial of the will and suicide. Suicide, he points out, is an affirmation of the will: the man who commits suicide wants joy out of life, is complaining because he hasn't found it, and finishes himself off. A man who has really denied the will shuns joy; he doesn't shun sorrow.

Mothersill: At the same time, if one is going to look at life from that kind of perspective, I *think*—I'm not sure, because I don't see life that way myself—I think the answer is surely the Buddhist answer; you find it in a kind of quietism, where rather than kill yourself you try, as much as you can, to live at peace with yourself.

Bryson: And it seems to me the one thing we've left out in a very complex and pretty tremendous fellow is the fact that, because he's a great writer as well as a great thinker, he's a wonderful person to read.

EDGAR LEE MASTERS

The Spoon River Anthology

(As broadcast March 6, 1955)

EDWARD DAVISON

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ALFRED KAZIN

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LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: When *The Spoon River Anthology* came out, almost forty years ago, it shook the literary world and to some extent the world of the general reader. Now, it's a bit difficult to find out just why.

Kazin: Only because the book has become so much a part of our accepted way of looking at things. These days I suppose there's hardly a child in any small town in America who, going to the library and pitying himself for being a poet, let us say, and in a Philistine environment, doesn't ask for *Spoon River* and isn't given the book as a matter of course.

Bryson: And it never occurs to him that every other village in the United States also has three or four young men worrying about the Philistine environment in which they happen to be caught.

Kazin: No, but the point is that in each age people get the Philistines they deserve. Of course, in our age one can't always recognize them as such. In this book the Philistines all are judges and bankers and they look the part. But to go back to your first question, Mr. Bryson: in 1915 Edgar Lee Masters was a lawyer in Chicago; he had been writing these poems almost, as he says in his autobiography, as in a dream, and he had been publishing them in *Reedy's Mirror*, which was a fine old-fashioned, insurgent, crusading, hard-hitting magazine of that period.

Bryson: Published in St. Louis?

Kazin: Published in St. Louis, Missouri. And the book was being serialized; a very noteworthy thing—a book of poems being serialized. Four or five poems appeared each week and people became extremely interested. They were stirred; they were excited; they were, of course, confused. They were confused because at that time, there's no doubt about it, poetry had to sound awfully poetic—an attitude which American poets in the middle west were to satirize until it became almost a stock-in-trade of the American poet. The satire has been rather overdone and has served, I think, as an excuse for writing bad poetry. But there's no doubt that these people thought of themselves as being the direct heirs of Masters; they saw themselves primarily as writing nothing but the truth in poetry.

Davison: It was a genuine revolt, wasn't it? I think it was particularly directed against the magazine poetry of the time; serious poets didn't want to write the kind of stuff that was acceptable to the magazines. Magazine verse was still the kind of thing that had been published in the *Gem* and the ladies' periodicals when Keats was alive.

It had stayed the same right through the nineteenth century, in England as well as in America, until it was no longer the voice of the poet or really the voice of the people—it was a voice speaking to an elderly lady sitting over her sewing basket. The better poets resented it, revolted against it, and wanted to write a different kind of verse.

Bryson: I think Masters felt that even the old lady sitting by her work basket had something fairly exciting in her past which he thought he could dig into, didn't he? Didn't he try to say in his own form (which certainly needs some discussion) that lives that look fairly respectable on the outside are fairly foul with tragedy and crime and deceit on the inside? Was that what disturbed people?

Kazin: Oh absolutely! People were disturbed because, in the language of the time, Masters tore the veil off. He told the Truth—always capitalized—about the real life of the village. Now, let's not be patronizing about this. I like this book very much indeed, was surprised to like it, think it packs a terrific punch, and feel that it does give one a genuine experience. I must say I was amazed to learn how much of that bitterness and intransigence is still there. Now, why was this? A small town, especially in the middle west, had been called the Valley of Democracy; it was the Little Arcadia, where underneath yon elm tree boy and girl walked together. And then, suddenly, the small-town poet left for Chicago; in small-town colonies in the rooming houses all these young men—Sherwood Anderson, Carl Sandburg, Floyd Dell and, of course, Edgar Lee Masters, who was a lawyer and who had a lot of money, actually, at that time—began to tell the truth. It was this that shocked people. The fanciful, the almost legendary obligation of Americans to be happy, happy, happy, had been for once seriously questioned.

Davison: Of course, there's the question, really, of the temperament of the writer concerned. Now, at the same time, or a little later, Vachel Lindsay was going out on his first trips as a kind of wandering bard and. . .

Bryson: And actually singing poetry for people to absorb!

Davison: That is right—earning his living, at least earning his bed and his board, by singing his own songs. But you would not find in him any of the violence and determined unmasking that are characteristic of Masters and, to some extent, though in a very much kinder way, of Sherwood Anderson. Lindsay was very soft and quiet and he had a great belief in people; the worst sin to him, in those days, was the saloon. He wrote in a freer verse than his predecessors had done, though not quite so freely as Masters did; personally, I think he had a very much better ear. I think Masters had a very defective ear, and that's one reason why so much of his verse does not read well aloud.

Bryson: So you think that it was the crabbedness, the apparently unpoetic character of his poetry, that added to the shock effect of what he did?

Davison: Yes. I think he was an angry man; I think he was a very frustrated man. I took some time to read his autobiography, which is a very remarkable book in many ways, and here is a man who is miserable in his own soul all the time, a man misplaced and un-

happy. You, Mr. Bryson, I think could perhaps give us a picture of what it was like to be a liberal, democratic lawyer in the middle west in the time of Altgeld and the big strikes; to be neglected by the people who should have loved you most (because Masters was neglected by his parents and his family); to live in very great poverty; to be denied an education for years and years; to be full of ambition, full of ideas, full of passion, and to have no outlet for those impulses.

Bryson: I knew the middle west of this time—that's perfectly true—but I have to counter by saying that the middle west I knew, and the middle west villages in which I grew up and lived, were not like Spoon River.

Kazin: No, and even if they were, you didn't know what lay under the tombstones.

Davison: Of course, I don't think there was ever any place quite like Spoon River. There's a line in one of Masters' poems that always occurs to me when I think of Spoon River, and that is where he said: "Death claimed them all in some hideous form." Life is never quite as unkind to people as it was in this book.

Kazin: No, but I think it's also perfectly true that any sensitive, yearning, frustrated young man, or old man, with a poet's soul—"a poet's soul"! I *did* say that, didn't I?

Davison: Yes!

Kazin: Well, I stand by it! Any man who has this, nevertheless, does see reflected around him the kind of life he bears inside himself. What one sees is not simply a distortion of one's own feelings, nor is it a photographic reality. The writer senses something about the suffering of others through his own sufferings. He cannot ever be perfectly objective. He is not, God help us—God be thanked!—a sociologist. He's not pretending to be an IBM machine, utterly disinterested. There is no doubt that Masters did project (I think that's the word now) a great deal of his personal spite, bile, biliousness, bitterness—the typical small-town lawyer's atmosphere of a whole eternity of afternoons spent in sitting around with the spittoon as the most beautiful object in reach and fighting for the rights of all the widows and orphans against the despotic trusts. Chicago was simply boiling over in those days. But one thing did happen. In those days there were two kinds of people: there were the sensitive, the rebels, the lonely, the yearners; on the other side of the fence, of course, were the rich. There's no doubt that Masters managed to convey this difference. Most of the people in Spoon River were victims—and this, I submit, was the note which so deeply shocked people, for Americans are not supposed to think of themselves as victims of life.

Davison: But they were just as much the victims of each other as of the bankers. The husbands were victims of the wives, or the wives of the husbands, or the children of the parents. I think what we ought to come back to is the fact that it's been characteristic of poets all through history to idealize their material. I don't know what the opposite word would be to "idealize," but whatever it is, that is what Masters did. Now, I'm not going to say that a certain value did not

come out of it. I think he made a very definite contribution. There might be questions of the qualitative value of that contribution, but he certainly was a pioneer; he certainly set a new tone; he kicked out a lot of old stuff, and he let in some air. It may not have been the purest or the finest air in the world, but it was the air of reality. That was a very useful thing to do; other poets were doing the same thing with other doors and other windows, about that same time.

Kazin: May I try to enumerate here very methodically, as is not my wont, what I think are the achievements of this book?

Bryson: The achievements? In terms of what you take to be Masters' own purpose?

Kazin: Yes. May I enumerate them very pedagogically? I think he tried to write a whole book of portraits which would present a small town in action. He tried to convey the idea that the dead, although they had already been dead in life and had never been allowed to speak of their secret sorrows, could now in some purely poetic, literary way speak for themselves. He tried to weave together many stories through the characters. He tried to indicate the universality of a small town's experiences as well as, at bottom, its narrowness and bigotry and hatred. The most famous of his characters is Anne Rutledge, Lincoln's very mythical sweetheart—at least their love was mythical. There are also people like Isaiah Beethoven and a man called Voltaire Johnson. He tried above everything else to write a book very much in the spirit that later on was to be employed by people like Sherwood Anderson in *Winesburg, Ohio*; by Zona Gale in her stories about Michigan; and by Thornton Wilder in the play, *Our Town*.

Bryson: Somebody from Wisconsin's going to write in and say Zona Gale lived in Wisconsin.

Kazin: I beg Wisconsin's pardon immediately! You're perfectly right. But most of all Masters tried to give the idea this was a microcosm of American life—and this is exactly the point, I think, at which people rebelled. The fact is that all these books were not meant to be local books. In some way or other, Spoon River became—well, I think a soured poet of the period said "Spoon River becomes all *Amerikee*." And there's no doubt that here is where Masters has been very deeply challenged, both as a poet and as a spokesman for the people. On the other hand, what was in back of his mind (although he couldn't follow that great man, didn't have anything like the same talent) was, of course, Whitman—Whitman's attempt to write a whole book about America, his attempt, as he put it so beautifully, to express the time and action we swim in.

Bryson: Do you want to take them one at a time, Mr. Davison?

Davison: No, I don't think I do. I think perhaps what I could do is to look at it from another point of view. Now, I'm going to try to be as fair as I possibly can. My great objection to Masters has always been the unfinished quality of his writing. I always feel not that it's rough-hewn, but that it's *carelessly* rough-hewn. There's plenty of rough-hewn stuff in Whitman and there's more than a lot of rough-hewn stuff in Shakespeare, but I always feel with Masters, especially

in *Spoon River*, that he has not really given us the best that was in him. The fact that he was writing these poems, five or six a week, for *Reedy's Mirror* at the same time that he was working very hard at other things, would rather suggest that the work is not as finished as I think an audience has a right to expect. I find his work unfinished, rough, and at times very crude, and underneath it all a considerable weakness disguised as strength. I find some of it pompous, and I find his outlook, his attitude toward life—philosophy is too strong a word—rather superficial; I think it very twisted, indeed, and I think twisted because of his peculiar temperament.

Bryson: Then you don't think that a man twisted into morbidity is more impressive than a man who is merely superficially gay?

Davison: No, I don't!

Kazin: I do like the book. You see, I'm in the other corner now. But I would agree with Mr. Davison that the best thing about the book is the conception, and that something of the brilliance and the bravery of this conception went into the making of it. Now, this rough-hewn quality—could you define it more closely, perhaps?

Davison: Well, I don't want to. I believe in positive and constructive criticism as far as possible, and I would rather dwell upon the good poems than spend our time on the bad ones.

Bryson: But most of the good poems at some point or other disappoint one!

Davison: What about the one called *Bert Kessler*? This, I think, is one of the best poems in the book, although I've never seen it in an anthology and I've never heard anybody quote it:

. . . I reached my hand, but saw no brier,
But something pricked and stung and numbed it.
And then, in a second, I spied the rattler—
The shutters wide in his yellow eyes,
The head of him arched, sunk back in the rings of him,
A circle of filth, the color of ashes,
Or oak leaves bleached under layers of leaves.
I stood like a stone as he shrank and uncoiled
And started to crawl beneath the stump,
When I fell limp in the grass.

Kazin: It's rather unfortunate, isn't it, that this very fine poem is spoiled by one or two tired expressions?

Bryson: Now, how *much* spoiled?

Kazin: Well, "a circle of filth, the color of ashes."

Bryson: Ah, yes, but it's highly subjective. It's not a good image because that's not at all what a rattlesnake looks like. But if you've just been stung to death . . .

Kazin: Yes, there is that. Normally, Masters was a defending attorney. In this book, there's no doubt, he became the prosecutor of a whole town. It's as if he were saying, "And now I arraign you all before the bar of history," and all the frustrated lovers and all the cheated widows and orphans now have their say in court. And, of course, it does have something of the stilted and formal grandiloquence of a courtroom hour in America. We Americans have so few chances,

I suspect, to indulge in the old-fashioned grace of style which older civilizations have. And too often, we know very well, lawyers do have this. This is my point: he did again and again, even in these supposedly plain poems, employ some of this conventional rhetoric. He did tend to write very tiredly. But I think these poems were called out of him as if in a kind of dream. This, by the way, is one of the good and bad things about *Masters*: this book was called out of him, literally called out of him, by the bitterest necessity. When a man plays too great a role himself, when everything he is, everything he has, is expanded upon in writing a book, it inevitably makes for a terrible unevenness—the very unevenness, I would say, of the human mind itself. There are certain autobiographies—for example, I just read one by the Scottish poet, Edwin Muir—which are extraordinarily beautiful and authentic because the whole man is embraced in that single book. At the same time, so much of the man's life has gone into the making of the book that, inevitably, there is a lack of that fine, final effort which we find in works that are more calm and disinterested.

Bryson: Do you want that even in the lyric poet?

Kazin: I think we do.

Davison: I think there's a difference between looking at a single poem and looking at a whole collection. *The Spoon River Anthology* is a complete work, made up of the sum of its parts. And like other fairly long works, some of its parts are likely to be less good than others. But here there are parts which are so much below the level of the best that they tend to spoil the whole, they stand out. For instance, even this poem which I just read has got in it at least half a dozen very serious flaws, which would exclude it from anybody's anthology of "the thousand best American poems." When you take, let's say, *The Oxford Book of English Verse*, which is one of the best anthologies we have, all kinds of wonderful stuff had to be excluded because of its demerits. What I'm trying to say is that we don't do any good to *Masters*, or to any poet, unless we are willing to compare him—his quality and his outlook and his cadences and his achievement—with that of the other major poets whose work we know.

Bryson: He always thought that he was challenging the great poets.

Kazin: Well, that, of course, reminds us of Carlyle's remark about Whitman: he said Whitman thought he was a big poet because he lived in a big country. But I do think that this book stands up. I think it stands up because it tried for something very new. Ironically enough, I don't think that *Masters* was really challenging Homer and Aeschylus and Dante and Goethe, but he was challenging, if you like, the newspaper of the time with its little gossip notes about marriages and engagements and funerals; that was in his line. And, actually, with which modern poet can you compare him when you think, for example, how utterly teeny-weeny—to use a famous phrase employed by Mr. Noel Coward—how teeny-weeny, how utterly short, abrupt, frustrated, starved of any human range or dimension, are

most of our poems of this kind? Poetry today has become immaculate, flawless—but it doesn't strive to tell very much.

Davison: I think you're very kind to it.

Kazin: The tone has been raised but all the blood has been left out. And here is Masters, with all his hideous faults and gaucheries—he is morbid, he is bitter, he is an old small-town crank, who's made up his mind that he's going to tell the truth about the town; and long after the neighbors are in bed, he keeps on jangling his bell up and down the streets, yelling "Hoo, ha, everybody is really awake plotting sins."

Davison: I will answer a question you asked a little earlier, when you said "With what other modern poet or poetry could you compare this?" I wouldn't compare it with modern poetry, I would compare it with Sherwood Anderson. On that comparison, I think we can probably place it on a higher level. Here is a realistic study—so realistic that it sometimes makes us all look sentimental—of a time and a place and people which the rest of the world knew very little about. When that happens, you've got to ask yourself how universal the treatment is. I think the best poems in *Spoon River* had a universal quality. But I think, taking it as a whole, that it shows too degraded, too unhappy, too violent a picture of a human society to really make the grade.

Bryson: After all, I grew up in this kind of community; and if this is a picture of what the middle western village was like, then I saw very little of what went on around me. But I think there's another point you made, which you didn't quite develop, as to his failure to avoid deep flaws which spoiled the effect even when he had a great theme. Sometimes, as in *Thomas Trevelyan*, for instance, he takes a classical theme and he writes in a classical cadence.

Davison: One of the most curious things about him is that in several of his very best poems he almost throws away the free verse form and falls into a meter, a very beautiful meter, not very far away from the Catullian hendecasyllable. The poem *Thomas Trevelyan* begins like this:

Reading in Ovid the sorrowful story of Itys,
Son of the love of Tereus and Procne, slain
For the guilty passion of Tereus for Philomela,
The flesh of him served to Tereus by Procne,
And the wrath of Tereus, the murderess pursuing
Till the gods made Philomela a nightingale,
Lute of the rising moon, and Procne a swallow . . .

Why, you're in another world altogether!

Bryson: I think he gets you into that world.

Davison: He does, and it shows that he understood it. Of course, every one of these poems is dramatically uttered by a character. Thomas Trevelyan, the man who is uttering this, obviously has a classical education and is a quite different kind of person from the man on the previous page who died of cirrhosis of the liver, or the murderer ten pages before that, or the prostitute twenty pages before that, or the lady who goes to live in Paris. By the way, the pictures of

Paris and of Europe in a few of the poems are really incredibly naive.

Kazin: On the other hand, there is so beautiful, and I might say so isolated, a piece of tranquil quietness as *Hare Drummer*:

. . . Now, the smell of the autumn smoke,
And the dropping acorns,
And the echoes about the vales
Bring dreams of life. They hover over me.
They question me:
Where are those laughing comrades?
How many are with me, how many
In the old orchards along the way to Siever's
And in the woods that overlook
The quiet water?

Davison: It's a pastoral!

Kazin: It is a pastoral. And he's very often at his best, I think, when he remembers not only the bitterness and the frustration and all the broken marriages, but also the sheer joys of being able to walk out into the country. One of the most beautiful poems is about *Lucinda Matlock*, she who was married for seventy years; she, of course, was Masters' own grandmother. I think there he really came close to reality, perhaps closer than he ever expected to.

Bryson: But he says in his own picture of a frustrated poet that there were great things all around him that the poet didn't see; only once in a while does he see them himself, and those, of course, are the times when he rises to his greatest poetry.

HENRY JAMES

What Maisie Knew

(As broadcast March 13, 1955)

CLIFTON FADIMAN

• JAMES THURBER

• LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: There seems to have been a revival of greatness for Henry James in the last few years. I'm not sure I can figure out just why. Have you any idea, Mr. Fadiman?

Fadiman: Well, I don't think it's hard to advance a couple of theories. One of the reasons is that he's been discovered by a number of scholars and university professors during the last fifteen or twenty years; they've popularized him, written books about him, and done a great deal of research in his letters and his life, so that he's been re-discovered in the same sense that Melville was.

Bryson: And it is a rich personality.

Fadiman: Then, another reason may be that James represents a

kind of writing of which we don't have a great deal today. He was probably one of the most careful novelists that ever lived—exhaustive in his study of human character and uncompromising in his devotion to style. Most of today's novels are easier to read than James, but easier, also, to exhaust: the meanings lie on the surface. And I think that the exhaustiveness of James's mind is one of the things that attract people to him these days. Wouldn't you think so, Mr. Thurber?

Thurber: Yes, I think so. You mentioned professors and scholars, but I suppose the revival actually began with John Balderston's dramatization of one of James's unfinished novels, *The Sense of the Past*, which became *Berkeley Square* on the stage (incidentally, it's Mansfield Square in the book). That was the beginning of a great interest in James not only on the part of the theatre, but the movies, radio and television as well. Since then we've had *The Heiress*, which is a dramatization of *Washington Square*; we've had *The Innocents*, a dramatization of *The Turn of the Screw*; and we've had a movie of *The Aspern Papers*. Recently, *The Portrait of a Lady* was on the stage but it didn't last long enough for me to get to see it.

Bryson: Isn't it rather ironic that Henry James, who all through his long life wanted to write successfully for the stage and failed, should now be so successful both on the stage and in the movies?

Thurber: I think that's the great irony of his life. Of course, he was a great artist and would be much interested in that. I hope he knows about it; he tried to believe in discarnate consciousness—perhaps he *does* know about it. His first great failure, the thing that discouraged him so, was *Guy Domville*. That was the one that was hissed off the stage, and you know what a hiss could do to Henry James.

Bryson: He *was* dramatic, in spite of that; he must have been, or you couldn't make good plays and movies out of his novels.

Thurber: Yes, that's true. What he lacked was the ability to write playable dialogue. I think perhaps he was too intelligent.

Fadiman: I think that's very probably true. He also didn't have quite the ability to be concise and to concentrate that plays demand; he's a spreading writer; he likes to exhaust the possibilities of a scene rather than hit you in the face with it.

Bryson: Overelaborate.

Fadiman: Overelaborate, yes. I think there's another reason for this return to Henry James, and that is that people are reading him because he's a non-sociological writer, as it were. We've had a plethora of sociological novels up to, oh, about ten years ago. But here's a man who deals in the most minute and delicate fashion with the inter-relationships among human beings, almost irrespective of the society of which they are a part. I don't mean to say that he's blind to the society, but what he wants to do is to exhaust the possibilities of these relationships among individuals. When you've finished a James novel, good or bad, you know the people very well. He's not trying to sell you characters as most modern novelists are trying to do, but actually to *create* them, so that they are just as real when you've finished one of his books as if they had been living with you for years.

Bryson: And aren't they also always moral agents? They are responsible people; what happens to them is partly their own fault. He doesn't show people as the mere playthings of social conditions.

Thurber: There is one thing, I think, that should be said here. A great many of his critics have said that his characters never have any background: they don't come out of shops or offices, they come out of the wings of the theatre onto his pages. They seem to live a few feet off the ground. Some people cannot find enough reality in them to have anything but impatience for James.

Bryson: But Mr. Fadiman just said that they *are* very real!

Thurber: They are—to you and to Mr. Fadiman and to me. But Mark Van Doren, for example, whom you and I respect as a critic, just cannot feel that.

Fadiman: I don't see why you have to determine for the reader a man's financial position, or his exact place in society, or who his father and mother were, before you can understand him. People exist very largely in terms of the kinds of minds and temperaments they have, and that was what James was interested in.

Bryson: And he showed that fate was derived out of those minds and temperaments.

Fadiman: That's why he is essentially dramatic; character *is* fate with him. It's just that he doesn't use the kind of dramatic scenes and mechanisms that a best-selling dramatist would use.

Bryson: And I think one has to distinguish very clearly, in talking about James, between dramatic quality and violent quality. James has very little violence, but in modern novels violence is almost a character in itself.

Thurber: On the other hand, in place of that, he has perhaps the most high-pitched interest in human relationships, in the subtleties and sensibilities of human experience. He constantly uses the words "awareness," "consciousness," "post of observation"; out of his constant study of the people around him he could get an excitement far greater, I think, than the average reader could get. That's one of the things that make his present popularity a little bit of a puzzle; he's not a writer for the great number of people.

Fadiman: Well, he still is not a best-selling novelist. This return to Henry James of which we speak is a fairly limited phenomenon. But perhaps it is not as limited as one might think. In addition to those other revivals that you mentioned, Benjamin Britten has just composed an operatic version of *The Turn of the Screw*. There must be something in this man which is permanent, which is continuously interesting, for him to be "rediscovered" like this. After all, he died in 1916.

Thurber: Certainly this vitality is a proof of greatness of some kind, whatever kind of greatness you want to call it. I'm still friends with all the characters in *The Ambassadors*, and when we discussed it on this program some years ago, I had not read the book in twenty years nor did I look at it before I came in. I didn't have to read it again.

Bryson: I don't think that it's too difficult to locate certain ele-

ments of his greatness, because I think James is really great in the classic tradition. He chooses a different kind of character, but he still deals with them in the way that all great classic writers have dealt with their characters.

Fadiman: Just because he happens to deal with people who are wealthy, who don't have to work for a living, doesn't necessarily mean that he isn't telling us great truths about human nature.

Bryson: That's right. And they're wealthy but not powerful; his people never seem to carry any of the burdens of running businesses or governments or anything like that. How is this all illustrated in *What Maisie Knew*? It's a typical Jamesian name. Where in the world did he get the names of all those girls he wrote about, Maisie and Daisy and so on?

Thurber: Mamie Pocock is my favorite.

Bryson: Did Americans really call their daughters by those names?

Fadiman: Around the turn of the century the gals' names were a little less fancy than they are now.

Thurber: He liked to use the simple, sometimes homey names—Kate and Milly . . .

Fadiman: It's the last names that are fancy.

Bryson: And here you have an elegantly named but very curious family, the Faranges, of which Maisie was the six or seven year old scion at the beginning of the book. What's the apparatus that he used to develop this tragicomedy about people of the kind we've been talking about? How did he do it?

Fadiman: Well, in this he was confronted with a problem of the kind that interested him very much . . .

Bryson: He confronted himself with it!

Fadiman: Yes, he made up this problem. Here, as you say, is a six or seven year old girl—I think she's about twelve by the time the novel is finished . . .

Bryson: When she's learned everything that any human being could know!

Fadiman: Yes; and we must, of course, admit right off the reel that this little Maisie is not an ordinary six or seven year old girl. She is part of the Jamesian consciousness, extremely, as Mr. Thurber says, "aware." She would probably grow up to be a kind of a Henry Jamesian novelist herself. The second thing that distinguishes her is the sweetness and purity and moral strength of her character, even though she's so small and so young. Now James places her in the middle of a strange and rather vicious quartet. Maisie is the young daughter of an upper-class Englishman named Beale Farange, who is married to Ida Farange. As the story opens, Ida and Beale have just arranged a divorce under very unhappy and rather scandalous circumstances. The problem is what to do with little Maisie; who is going to take her over—shall it be Ma or shall it be Pa? And the story begins, as I recollect, with each of these two vicious people trying to use the little girl as a weapon against the other.

Thurber: That's exactly it.

Bryson: Ida wants to take Maisie away from Beale and Beale wants to take Maisie away from Ida.

Thurber: They also use her as a courier of their hatreds.

Bryson: The poor little girl is like a shuttle going back and forth between these people, carrying the hatred of one for the other.

Fadiman: Yes. Well, this situation would be interesting enough for a normal novelist, but we have in James far more than a normal novelist. He now introduces another pair of lovers. Ida Farange marries the English aristocrat, Sir Claude—isn't that the name?—and little Maisie is confided partially to the care of Ida and Sir Claude.

Bryson: She's now acquired a stepfather.

Fadiman: Then there is an attractive governess involved—Miss Overmore, when the story begins.

Bryson: I remember that at one point, with obvious comic intent, he calls her "the flower of the Overmores."

Fadiman: And we find Sir Claude . . . let's see now—we have Mrs. . . .

Bryson: Now don't get mixed up!

Fadiman: Miss Overmore now falls in love with, and is loved by, Beale Farange.

Bryson: At any rate, she marries him. I doubt whether she really loved him.

Fadiman: Now we have a quartet. The problem for James is how much can we learn about these four people, all of them idle, three of them certainly very unattractive and morally reprehensible—how much can we learn of their goings on, their adulterous connections, through the pure but very sympathetic and clear-sighted mind of the little girl of seven.

Thurber: Yes, that's the basis of it.

Bryson: Isn't there an added irony in the fact that the most vicious of the four are her own parents? She has two parents and two step-parents, and her step-parents are married to her real parents; it's a very complicated setup.

Fadiman: But you say that much more clearly than I could!

Bryson: It doesn't add to clarity to say it, I'm afraid. But the only one of the four who really has any decency and who seems to be irresistibly attractive is her stepfather, Sir Claude.

Fadiman: Yes, but he too has an Achilles heel.

Bryson: That's right—women.

Fadiman: Although he's attractive and he's kind to the poor little girl, he, too, is weak.

Bryson: I think he loves the little girl.

Fadiman: Yes, but does he, in the end, love her enough? This is a book about love. It's a question as to who'll be saved by love. Really, what James is trying to do is to say the world can only be saved if there's enough love in it, and he uses this little girl as a test of the amount of love that there is in these four people.

Bryson: That's right, but you didn't get in all the complications, because her stepfather falls in love with her stepmother.

Thurber: Even that is just the beginning of it, because this little

girl is exposed to an unbelievable array of her mother's lovers. There's Lord Eric; there's a man called the Count; there's a man called the Captain; there's Mr. Perriam, who comes from the City of London; and, finally, Ida runs away to South Africa with one Tischbein. We never hear of him except his name—Maisie missed meeting him. But she is thrown up against the Countess, the unbelievably grotesque friend of her father, with whom he is going to America.

Bryson: Being paid by the Countess, who's an American and has a fortune—being paid to be her, shall we say, companion on the trip to America.

Thurber: This little girl runs into these lovers and other relations of her mother and father at flower shows, in carriages, on the street and in parks. Her daily life is a series of such encounters, in which the language often becomes very overdone, it seems to me—"unspeakable" and "dreadful monster"; the mother tells her everybody's a "dreadful" this or that, everybody's "lost" or "saved," usually in quotes.

Bryson: But how do you explain that this sordid quartet, in which the cross currents of hatred and illicit love are so complicated you can't even describe them in brief compass, are always calling her—the one little center of innocence—they're always calling her a "little monster." Why?

Thurber: Well, I don't know. Of course, she represents, as you said, the Henry Jamesian innocence itself, which is a pretty strong innocence. To me this child seems to have no psyche and no central nervous system. I went through the book to see how many times she was clutched to their bosoms; they leaped upon her, they grabbed her to their breasts time and again. She should have had at least three broken ribs, a displaced clavicle, and I don't know how many bruises . . .

Bryson: And perhaps a neurosis on top of it.

Fadiman: Well, that's our American point of view, because we don't produce little girls of this sensitivity and perception.

Bryson: Or vigor and resistance.

Fadiman: I think she was armored, first, by her purity of mind, and secondly, by her intelligence . . .

Bryson: But Mr. Thurber's talking about her *ribs*, Mr. Fadiman!

Fadiman: Well, the ribs I don't know about.

Thurber: Then I think at this point we should go back to the date of the book. It was written in 1897, which might be described as the Day Before Anything Happened, or the eve of modern history. Maisie did not have what little girls have today: the pressures of the outside world, the fear of annihilation, or any of those things. All she had was the clop-clop of horses and four-wheelers. I happened to run my mind over what had not yet occurred in 1897, and what *was* to occur in the next eight years, including the sinking of the Maine, the Spanish-American war, the Boer war, the Russo-Japanese war, the death of Queen Victoria, the assassination of President McKinley, the rise of a young man named Teddy Roosevelt and of another named

Winston Churchill—to say nothing of Bryan, the dawn of sex in the Harry K. Thaw-Stanford White case, or the founding of the Associated Press.

Fadiman: Why, Mr. Thurber, she missed practically everything!

Bryson: There was an awful lot that Maisie *didn't* know.

Thurber: Her psyche was actually exposed to nothing except physical bruising.

Bryson: Physical bruising and moral assault, after all. But I think they were constantly calling her a "little monster" because she seemed to know what was in their evil minds.

Fadiman: That's the trouble: she represents the conscience of the book, the conscience that is asleep in these people, and she awakens it every time they come in contact with her. If it were not for Maisie, they could proceed to live out their vicious and their dreadful quarrels without ever being confronted with goodness. Goodness upsets them; it upsets their whole moral universe. She represents the upsetting of their universe, and that's why they hate her on the one hand and on the other hand desire to have her as an ally. They're always fighting to have her on their side, because they feel that somehow this little child has a moral weight that would be very nice to have working with them, rather than against them. And that, after all, is the point of the book: because what we want to find out, as the book proceeds along its tortuous way—it is a very tortuous book—is how is poor little Maisie going to come out of it; whom will she choose?

Bryson: Perhaps you have to introduce Mrs. Wix?

Fadiman: This is where Mrs. Wix comes in. She is a lower-class character, I think a very successful one. Mrs. Wix is a not very good looking, middle-aged, dowdy governess. She is the only one who truly loves Maisie, who doesn't want to get anything out of her except love in return. Mrs. Wix begins as a very unimportant character—one imagines that it's the aristocratic quartet that is to be the center of the story. Not so; it is the line of moral relationship between the unattractive, dowdy Mrs. Wix and the little girl that turns out to be the important line of relationship, because goodness in the end calls to goodness.

Bryson: And what is good in Mrs. Wix makes her completely devoted to little Maisie, without expecting anything in return. Is that the point?

Fadiman: Yes, she's unselfish. She's a foolish woman in many ways, a violent woman in some ways, but she is good. In the end, as you remember—I think it seems, Mr. Thurber, despite the weaknesses of the book that you've pointed out, to be a pretty good ending—in the end, the question comes as to who shall take Maisie and protect her for the rest of her life. And Maisie says to Sir Claude, whom she likes and admires very much indeed—any girl would—"If you will give up your bad relationship with Mrs. Beale, then I will go with you and I will abandon Mrs. Wix." In other words, she confronts Sir Claude with a test of his moral stamina. He fails, for all his charm.

Bryson: And all his love of the little girl!

Fadiman: Yes, and therefore she goes to the only person in the book who emerges finally as good and unselfish—to wit, the dowdy old governess. I think that's a rather effective scene.

Thurber: Yes, it is. I don't think we can leave this out: that Henry James transfers to this child his own beautiful and wonderful interest in the whole thing, and so does some violence to her reality. I kept seeing this little child as the mouthpiece of Henry James, a man of fifty, of great strength of mind and character and morals. This little girl can't fail as long as she is playing the part of Henry James. It's the same with Lambert Strether in *The Ambassadors*: everything in the world happens to him in Paris, but he beautifully comes through, as you know. He's excited by the very drama of it, because Henry James himself is more excited by the drama of human relationships than by anything else.

Bryson: But he is never a *participant* in the drama of human relations.

Fadiman: Does Mr. Thurber mean that this is not a convincing portrait of a child? We know that James was very much interested in children. *The Turn of the Screw*, one of his most popular books, is about two small children, and he uses children again and again in his novels. Do you think that this is an unconvincing portrait, that no little girl could be as perceptive, as aware as he makes her?

Thurber: I think that Henry James's awareness was so special in him as a man and writer that, in transferring it to his characters, he draws it out a little finer than the average character or writer would do. But we must not lose sight of the fact that this moral sense of Henry James, this innocence that triumphs, is one of his fine qualities as a writer. This is what sets his books off from those of anybody else, especially in this time of disillusion, decay, bedlam, and the chaotic relations of men and women.

Fadiman: Yes. Nor are they, as many people say, merely esthetic games. What makes James great is the fact that he is a moral writer in exactly the same sense that Dante is a moral writer, though on a different level, of course. He's interested in good and evil. It isn't that he takes a programmatic point of view, or preaches at us, but that he is always interested in trying to determine the amount of moral turpitude in the human heart, or the means by which the human heart may save itself.

Bryson: It seems to me that one of the points—there are several of them—at which this little girl is not only very real, but also very touching, are places where she almost seems not to know what's going on. One of the scenes that stick in my mind is when she meets her egregious, impossible mother, clattering with jewels—you remember he says that when Maisie is clasped to her mother's bosom, she feels as if she's breaking into a jewelry shop—walking in the park. Maisie is with her stepfather, Sir Claude, whom the mother has long since abandoned. They meet the mother walking with a strange character called "the Captain." And because Sir Claude and the mother want to have a conversation about the latter's misbehavior—it gets dreadfully complicated, doesn't it?—Maisie goes off a bit with her mother's

lover, the Captain, who is evidently not yet very intimate with Ida and doesn't know her very well; and the Captain says, "Your mother is good," and Maisie says "Yes; will you love her more than the others have?"

Fadiman: Yes!

Bryson: The Captain is a little taken aback by this "more than the others have"; what is this little girl anyway? But the child's completely innocent plea for her mother is a betrayal not of how much she knew, but of her absolutely unassailable innocence in all of this. And to me it is a very moving passage.

Thurber: Also her desire—what any child would want—for a normal relationship with her mother.

Fadiman: Yes, it shows great wisdom on the part of Maisie, and that's of course the whole point of the book—she knows that any of these characters, who seem to be acting so badly, can be redeemed by love, if enough love is given to them, if they're taught to give love back in return. And she looks to the Captain to give this dreadful mother of hers love; she can't phrase it, she doesn't know why, but she knows that love is the key. So we cannot say of her that she's innocent in the sense of being naive at all.

Bryson: Oh, no!

Fadiman: She has a wisdom of the heart that far transcends the sophistication of all the grownups in the book.

Bryson: Are we turning back to this kind of writer—given that he is a great writer—because we don't care about sociological movements in the world and what happens in society? Was James indifferent to the world around him?

Fadiman: Oh, I don't think so at all. It's just that he doesn't write formula sociological novels. He was very much interested, for example, in his American novels, in the growth of the middle class; he had a very keen understanding of what our increasing wealth was doing to us at the turn of the century; he was extremely interested in the relationship between Europe and America, a thing that we are very much interested in now, in 1955, but whose interconnections he saw much more clearly in 1895.

Bryson: Do you think that if James had tried to write a sociological novel, in the sense that we're now getting tired of, he could have done it?

Thurber: Well, in the first place he was profoundly uninterested—not disinterested, profoundly *uninterested*—in a great many things that are surprising. He was interested in painting—the whole James family was—but not in music; there are no concerts in this book. And as you said, there's no eating in it. One of my professors once pointed out that in twelve James novels there are only three times that food is mentioned; an omelette with a bottle of straw-colored wine in *The Ambassadors*, for instance. Moreover, James's attitude toward Freud seems to have been a little bit like his attitude toward spiritualism: it annoyed him to some extent. Lately there has been a lot of modern psychiatric analysis of *The Term of the Screw*, which seeks

to prove that James was not in command of his own story; the governess was something other than he thought. But all that is psychological nonsense, I think.

Bryson: And possibly even in *What Maisie Knew* he shows an instinct and a perception which the psychologists might take a long time to catch up with.

JUVENAL

Satires

(As broadcast March 20, 1955)

GILBERT HIGHET • ANDRE MICHALOPOULOS • MASON GROSS

Gross: I think most people are somewhat vague as to when Juvenal lived and who he was and even exactly what his name was. If I remember rightly, he belongs to the period called the Middle Empire, or the period of the "silver age" of Latin literature, or whatever those various phrases are.

Highet: He is really a puzzle in many ways. That's why I spent so long trying to find out about him. I remember the late Irwin Edman—rest him and bless him!—once asked me what I was writing. I said I was writing about Juvenal, and he said: "Oh, good! We don't have enough books for children." He knew what I meant perfectly well, of course. The man's name was Decimus Junius Juvenalis in Latin—we call him Juvenal—and he lived in the middle period of the Roman empire. I think he was born about 55 or 60 A.D. and he died about 130 A.D.

Gross: And if I'm right, he lived through some of the worst periods of the Roman empire.

Michalopoulos: He lived through the reigns of eleven emperors—well, not quite through the reigns of all of them, but in his lifetime he saw eleven emperors; of those eleven, four were assassinated, two died violent deaths by suicide, and the deaths of the others were not all entirely normal. It was a very turbulent period.

Highet: It was a period rather like a prolonged dictatorship, and not the kind of political life to which we are accustomed. Don't you agree?

Michalopoulos: Yes, and not even a "civilized" dictatorship, but a dictatorship that was ruthless and selfish and very oppressive.

Highet: Worse than that: unpredictable. I have reconstructed Juvenal's life, and I think one of the things which touched him off as a satirist was his failure to get government employment. He wrote a small lampoon on corruption at the court, and instantly—*instantly*—he was arrested and sent to the equivalent of Siberia . . .

Michalopoulos: Egypt.

Highet: Yes, equatorial Egypt, the remotest possible place, and apparently for life. He makes a very pungent remark about his times when he says, "Few are the rulers who go down to Hades save by sword and slaughter, few are the kings who perish by bloodless death."

Gross: If I'm right, he was most bitter about the Emperor Domitian. But he didn't write until considerably later; most of his satires were written in the reign of the Emperor Hadrian—is that right?

Highet: Yes. The best parallel I could give you would be Dostoevsky, who was arrested and exiled in his thirties—sent to Siberia, just after a much more deadly sentence had been passed on him (he was actually sentenced to death and lined up before the firing squad, when an officer galloped up with a reprieve and he was sent on the long trip to Siberia). He stayed there. He thought it was a life sentence. He was finally pardoned and sent home, where he did not react as Juvenal did. Dostoevsky, when he came back, became a fervent supporter of the Tsar and a pan-Slav; Juvenal came back thoroughly embittered and began to write satires about the regime under which he had suffered so much.

Michalopoulos: He's a completely bitter man, and he's bitter not only against the regime, but against everything in life—chiefly, of course, against the rich, against the Roman upper classes.

Gross: I think perhaps we've got to know something else about Juvenal. If I am correct, when he came back he wrote these books of satires—some sixteen satires in all—and that's all he wrote; isn't that so?

Highet: That's right. In other words, this is rather a unique man in that he wrote nothing but this relatively small number of poems, and on those his reputation is based entirely.

Michalopoulos: Mr. Highet, you're an authority on this man and I'm not. Is it true that these satires are all he wrote, or did he write something else that has been lost?

Highet: The last satire is unfinished, and it probably ran on for three or four hundred lines more which are lost; beyond this, we don't know of a single thing he wrote except the little lampoon which got him sent into exile. That's all there is: only four thousand lines, at most, in his life's work. It means that he spent a long, long time digesting all this venom, compressing it, in order to make it immortal. Very few authors do that now. The average satiric novel nowadays runs to seven or eight hundred pages; Juvenal's whole work doesn't run to more than about seventy.

Gross: Whom would you identify as a satirist today, so that we can understand, perhaps, exactly what Juvenal was trying to do?

Highet: Really, we ought to find out first what satire is.

Michalopoulos: That raises an interesting point. Aristophanes wrote a lot of criticism of his time in dramatic verse. It qualifies as satire in a sense, but there is not this dedication to nothing except satire which we get in Juvenal, and which we get to a certain extent in

Horace before him. Horace, though, seems to me to be much more cheerful, much more benevolent.

Highet: Much!

Michalopoulos: He finds a great deal of good in human beings and in his surroundings. Of course, he lived in a very good and happy age; he was patronized by the emperor and the court, and he had no reason to complain. Anyway, I suppose that satire is a Roman invention.

Highet: Yes, it is.

Michalopoulos: And if we want to define it, I think we must say that it is criticism of life in a sarcastic vein. The Romans called it "joking in earnest," and the criticism, at once scathing and humorous, must somehow make either the victim or the onlooker wince and grin at the same time.

Highet: The grin is rather an evil one.

Michalopoulos: Yes. It isn't a cheerful grin in Juvenal. In Horace it is. You laugh with Horace when he talks about his slave, who's a bit of a scoundrel, you feel that he's . . .

Highet: Affectionate?

Michalopoulos: Affectionate, yes. The parallels to Roman satire in modern literature are Rabelais, who disliked a great number of things but enjoyed life and laughed heartily; Swift, who hated practically everything and whose worst satires have scarcely a trace of a grin left in them; and Dr. Johnson, to a certain extent. Today, I would say the nearest we come to Juvenal—it's not in verse and it's not so compact, by any means—is in Philip Wylie, an author whom I do not like at all.

Gross: But he has the impulse.

Michalopoulos: He has the same impulse, but he finds fault where fault is not to be found.

Gross: Of course, his contemporaries would have said the same thing about Juvenal. I think perhaps the most impressive thing about Juvenal and his influence is the fact that we take his picture of Rome, and of the upper-classes in Rome, to be the literal truth, don't we?

Highet: That's it—and it is always a dangerous thing to do with satirists. It's always dangerous: they see only part of the picture, and that they exaggerate and distort for effect. They are negative critics only, and such he was.

Michalopoulos: I don't think he tells the whole part of the truth, by any means. A man who cannot say one word of good for anyone in the whole of his work cannot be telling the whole truth. I think that he's accurate in his biting criticism of many abuses—and there were many—but it's not a truthful presentation of the state of affairs in Rome, bad though they were at the time.

Gross: He's reinforced, isn't he, by some of his contemporaries? When you read Martial, you get the same general impression of Rome.

Highet: And, remember, in the Bible we can find something of the same. Many of the Hebrew prophets spoke with the same bitterness of their own contemporaries, of their own kings, and of their own church.

Gross: One of the continuing objects of his attack is the big city and all the attendant evils that go along with it. He seemed to be attacking not merely individuals in Rome, but the whole city, the whole civilization, and all the terrible effects it had on the people who lived there.

Highet: That's a contemporary subject. More and more people are now finding that life in a really big city is intolerable. Some escape by moving to the suburbs, but some live on in the big city and complain all the time, or go crackers.

Gross: Take, for example, that satire in which Juvenal is talking to a friend who's chucking the big city forever and moving back into the country again; you have in it the same kind of rural impulse that we feel today.

Highet: It's a fine satire. The friend says goodbye at the gate of Rome and adds: "I must explain why I'm going, because you have been a friend of mine all my life. You may think it odd that I'm shutting myself off from society. I will now tell you what is wrong with life in the big city"—and out comes a catalog of horrors which we can accept today, I think, in all but one respect. The only thing Juvenal does not complain about is, oddly enough, organized crime. He says "on the way home you may be accosted and beaten up by a drunk," but he doesn't complain about mugging, he doesn't complain about gangsterism. Apparently there was hardly any of that in Rome.

Gross: Of course, what he's really complaining about, and what his friend is really fleeing from, is the horrible habits of the rich—and this whole system built up of patronage and everything else.

Michalopoulos: He does say that Rome is full of drunks who can only sleep after they've had a good brawl. He does say that there were no lights at night in the streets—because people have to go home holding a little wick, a lamp in their hands, and fostering the light by putting a hand around it. He says that there are cutthroats; what the cutthroats were doing he doesn't say, but they're there. He says that all the iron that is mined is going into chains for criminals instead of into plowshares. So the criminals are there by implication—yet the Rome of the old kings had only one jail. And he says that the chariots of the rich break insolently through the crowds, jamming the narrow streets—so they had a traffic problem, although it was created by Cadillacs rather than by trucks. And he mentions our old friend, insomnia.

Highet: He says one reason you can't sleep is because the noise gives you indigestion. A vicious circle is then started, and quite soon you'll find yourself on the way to your funeral.

Michalopoulos: One thing that I find extremely fascinating in this description has no parallel in modern life: the picture of the streets of Rome being crowded by hundreds of clients going to the house of a patron, of a rich man, with their little kitchen stoves in hand to get a meal from him. He dispenses these favors, presumably for political advantage or something of the sort. All these men come along with their little stoves to get this food from the rich man's house and go home and eat it. Now, that is most extraordinary. It

was really a degeneration, as everything in Rome was, of what had at one time been rather a good institution—namely, the idea that a rich man with a large number of friends in humble circumstances would invite them to drop in for a meal whenever they liked.

Highet: That was real friendship, that was the kind of friendship that Horace had with Maecenas; if he came to see Maecenas, there would always be a place for him at the table. But as the bond grew more relaxed or more commercial, the friends of the rich man put him, as it were, on the free list. They said "I will dine with you every Tuesday, Thursday, or Saturday," and the rich man said "Well, if you don't want to, may I give you a token meal and you can take it home?"

Gross: And actually gave them money in place of food; they simply went around to collect.

Highet: It was degrading and horrible then.

Michalopoulos: There was universal poverty among the free citizens of Rome at that time. Juvenal says *Hic vivimus ambitiosa paupertate omnes*—"Here we all live in a state of pretentious poverty." The citizens of Rome couldn't get a job because the slaves did all the work free.

Highet: I wouldn't agree.

Michalopoulos: You wouldn't?

Highet: No; Juvenal never thinks of taking a job—never! He thinks he ought to live on an income of his own or on an income supplied by a rich man. The idea that he could get down to work, perhaps behind a counter in a store, never occurs to him any more than it would occur to us to take to organized crime.

Michalopoulos: I wasn't suggesting that Juvenal would ever agree to that, but what I am suggesting is that the free citizens of Rome had got into a state of believing themselves to be great and magnificent people, although they had no money to live by. The slaves did all the work, so that even if they did have any desire to work, they couldn't.

Highet: That I don't agree with.

Michalopoulos: But I have always felt that that was one of the social causes of the decline of Rome.

Highet: Honestly not. It was rather the idea that work was degrading for a gentleman. The same kind of thing existed in Italy until fairly recently, and may still exist. The poet Leopardi, for instance, had an income to live upon that you or I would think laughable; we would immediately take another job. But Leopardi's father and mother husbanded their small capital with the most infinite care, rather than to submit any member of the family to the disgrace of opening a shop or taking a job as a teacher or anything of that kind. That attitude has, I feel sure, survived from Juvenal's time and may still survive.

Michalopoulos: But they would accept . . .

Highet: Money, yes.

Michalopoulos: Money, bread and circuses, but not work. Inci-

dentially, that phrase *panem et circenses*—"bread and circuses"—was originated by Juvenal.

Highet: That's a thing we haven't said, have we? We haven't said that he's a very good poet, who can coin splendid phrases.

Gross: I am always surprised by the absorption of Juvenal and some of his other contemporaries with the banquet. I remember the vivid pictures of this horrible rich man presiding at the head of the table, eating an entirely different kind of food from that which is given to the friends who come in; and then, of course, there's that magnificent satire on the big fish, the big turbot, and the problem of what to do with it. What did they finally do, Mr. Highet?

Highet: It was a phenomenal fish, a turbot the size of this table—and it was sent, naturally, to the emperor, as a sturgeon caught in British waters is always sent to Buckingham Palace. But the satire is really on the emperor himself, who had such domination over his cabinet and yet was such a fool that he called a cabinet meeting to discuss what to do with a fish. It was a sacrilege to cut it up because you would lose some of the flavor, and yet no existing pan in the imperial kitchens was big enough. One of the wily old councillors, a fellow banqueter of Nero's, thought what to do: "Call a potter quickly, and have him make a pot to fit—and from now on, be never without a potter in your palace."

Gross: If I remember rightly, this particular fish was so anxious to be presented to the emperor that he leapt out of the water, didn't he?

Michalopoulos: Now that we're on this subject of great meals, one of the satires which I like the best is the fifth.

Highet: The horrible dinner.

Michalopoulos: Which George Chapman, in his translation made in the early seventeenth century, calls "A just reproofe of a Roman Smell-feaste."

Highet: Yes. As Mr. Gross says, the host eats different food from the guests.

Michalopoulos: The host is a hog. This great lord, Virro, has a lamprey served to him of extraordinary size, which was taken out of the Sicilian Gulf, while all he gives the poor guest is a common eel, "looking like a snake," as Juvenal says.

Gross: It isn't only the meals and the rich people that he satirizes, it's also women. If ever anybody has been more devastating in his attack on the whole of the female of the species, I've yet to find him.

Highet: Yes, the sixth satire. There are seven hundred lines of attack on women for every possible vice and folly, from using too much makeup to the vilest of crimes, including the murder of their children and husbands.

Michalopoulos: And, of course—I think this is very delightful—amongst all the other crimes, apparently one of the worst that women can commit is to indulge in literary criticism.

Highet: There are some funny passages on that.

Michalopoulos: Well, there's a lot in that satire which is applicable today. But it is horrible, this continual lashing of woman.

Highet: Oh, it's horrible, and it's cynical; he has not one good

word for any woman in the world. Is that why you mentioned Philip Wylie, Mr. Michalopoulos?

Michalopoulos: Yes, that's why I don't like Philip Wylie. He hasn't a good word for anything American, and I think that there isn't this cult of "mom-ism" to the extent that Wylie suggests.

Highet: On the other hand, I do believe that on that score Juvenal was telling a good part of the truth about Roman women.

Gross: Of course, these were mostly upper class women that he was talking about—the over-rich and so on.

Michalopoulos: He doesn't say they were weak and vicious, he says they were *strong* and vicious.

Highet: Strong and of violent will-power and profound self-assertion; they were usually stronger than all the men whom they corrupted and dominated.

Michalopoulos: *Sic crescit numerus, sic fiunt octo mariti
quinque per autumnos . . .*

"They marry eight husbands in five autumns." You find a great many ladies in society today who do that.

Gross: To come back to Mr. Highet's point about Juvenal as a poet, there's the vividness of his attack—I think that's why we remember this attack on women, on the rich man at his banquet, and so on. But it isn't only vividness, is it? This man is a superb phrase-maker.

Highet: Oh, he's a wonderful poet and a wonderful mimic. Of course, that's one reason one learns Latin and teaches Latin. No English translator, no French translator, or any other can render all the sound effects. Listen to this, for instance. He is complaining bitterly about the foreigners who have come into Rome, and in one single line he conveys the effect of their language in the streets:

Ite, quibus grata est picta lupa barbara mitral
Isn't that fantastic? That's Latin, and yet he's made it sound like another language.

Gross: He has produced many phrases that we remember. Not only the *panem et circenses* that you were talking about, Mr. Michalopoulos, but we also have from Juvenal *mens sana in corpore sano*.

Highet: A sound mind in a sound body. . . .

Gross: . . . As the objective of education. Can you think of any other particular phrases or passages?

Highet: He's got the same epigrammatic ability, really, that Martial has, and yet he puts it into hexameters in these long satires.

Michalopoulos: Talking about the Roman people, he said:

. . . *Nam qui dabat olim
imperium fasces legiones omnia, nunc se
continet atque duas tantum res anxius optet,
panem et circenses.*

"This great people who once bestowed *imperium*, the command, legions, *fasces*, the consulships, now only anxiously looks for two things: bread and circuses." Well, that is compressed in such a way that it's untranslatable; it's great verse.

Gross: What do you think are good translations of Juvenal? Of course, we start with either Chapman or Dryden.

Highet: Dryden is the best, really. Dryden did five himself and farmed the others out to his sons and his friends, and apparently edited them with great care. Why I like Dryden so much is because he actually adds things which Juvenal would like to have thought of. Another good translation is by Gifford, which has been edited by John Warrington. It has just been published in the Everyman edition, No. 997.

Michalopoulos: Gifford wrote it about a hundred years ago.

Highet: Exactly. It's fairly good. And listen to this as a sample of Juvenal's positive side. He's asking what you should pray for—money or old age or political power or what? No, he says, none of these: pray for something internal:

O Thou who knowst the wants of humankind,
Vouchsafe me health of body, health of mind,
A soul prepared to meet the frowns of fate,
And look undaunted on a future state,
That reckons death a blessing, yet can bear
Existence nobly with its weight of care.

Michalopoulos: Juvenal has these marvellously compressed phrases, such as this one: "As he shaved, my youthful beard sang under the razor."

Gross: Is this the barber who subsequently became the Prime Minister or something, which Juvenal could never forgive?

Michalopoulos: . . . *Quo tondente gravis juveni mihi barba sonabat*. Well, you cannot translate it. I said "sang under the razor"; it's not "sang," it's *sonabat*—this pleasant, agreeable grating of the beard on the razor. And he's given it in a single word, *sonabat*.

Highet: It's very hard; and it is really rare for a satirist to be poetic in any way at all. How would you translate *madidique infantia nasi*? The childishness of a dripping nose?

Michalopoulos: It applies to an old man who sniffles in second childhood. And in three words: *madidique infantia nasi*!

Highet: You know that he was loved all through the Middle Ages as a sage. The Christians knew very well he wasn't one of them, but they did approve of his prophetic tone.

Gross: They had a common object of attack.

Highet: Exactly. So you find him quoted by all kinds of people throughout the Middle Ages, from the Popes themselves down through the philosophers at the University of Paris to the wandering Goliard scholars. They all knew their Juvenal and quoted him. One of the greatest of all the Popes, Innocent III, quoted him in rebuke to the Church on the danger of simony.

Gross: One of the things that I find interesting and perhaps a little depressing about Juvenal is that he attributes all this degradation in Rome to the effects of a long peace. The Romans themselves had, I gather, not been fighting; there were wars going on on the fringes of the empire, but they hadn't been involved in them. We're usually apt to think of periods of moral breakup as occurring either

during or immediately after a war, but Juvenal goes back to the old Roman philosophy that you've got to have the discipline of war in order to keep a civilization going; in a long peace, you'll go to pieces.

Highet: It might be true. He wasn't the only one who said so. All the philosophers wondered why Rome was becoming morally corrupt, and they all concluded that when Rome was fighting, she had had power *and* responsibility. When she had stopped fighting and had no more enemies to fear, she had the power and the wealth, but no sense of responsibility whatever.

Gross: It really is extraordinary. You have a picture here of an enormous city with a tremendous amount of wealth, although not evenly distributed, and nothing to do. Even the emperors didn't come to Rome as much any more, did they? Trajan and Hadrian were always wandering around the empire? It's a curious picture of an aimless city which had lost all moral status and direction.

Highet: You mustn't suspect me of being merely a Scotch moralist. But, you know, I sometimes console myself in the middle of all our political anxieties by thinking that, dangerous as the world situation is and apparently will go on being for the rest of the century, at least it keeps us alive to the realities of life and the connection between wealth and responsibility, which otherwise we might forget.

Michalopoulos: I would agree to that. I do think, though, that there is a suggestion in Juvenal that some of the trouble comes from the number of foreign elements that had flooded into the city from all over the empire—Syrians and Persians and Greeks and Egyptians and Jews. They had all brought with them their own peculiar religious practices. Juvenal attacks occultism, astrologers, numerologists, Chaldeans—all these things which, incidentally, seem to flourish among us today.

Gross: He comes back again and again to a theme which engaged one of his imitators later on, the vanity of human wishes. That is, Dr. Johnson carries on that theme. Who else would you say were the great historical followers of Juvenal?

Highet: Boileau, R  gnier, and finally, of all people, Victor Hugo. He was, however, the kind of poet we don't much enjoy reading nowadays.

Michalopoulos: But, Mr. Highet, I adore Victor Hugo!

Highet: I mean Juvenal. He was fundamentally a pessimist. And we don't like pessimism, even if we admit that it may be true.

Gross: And we don't like the horrible realism. Here is a man who with his satirical weapons has gone right to the naked soul of a society and has pointed out all its weaknesses. He is completely merciless in his dissection of the Roman world.

Michalopoulos: Boileau, in his imitation of him, says:

"From Japan to Rome, from Paris to Peru
Man is the silliest beast in any view."

Gross: That's the conclusion that Juvenal seems to come to, isn't it?

JONATHAN EDWARDS

Freedom of Will

(As broadcast March 27, 1955)

CLARENCE FAUST • THOMAS H. JOHNSON • MASON GROSS

Gross: Jonathan Edwards is a familiar name to anybody who has studied American history, but I doubt that most people who know his name know very much about him as a man, or have anything more than an impression of a rather grim and austere clergyman. I think it might be important, then, if we got straight a few facts about who he was, when he lived, and things of that sort. Of course, we always associate him, don't we, with the Connecticut River Valley?

Johnson: Yes; except for a few years in his youth and at the end of his life, he spent his whole life in the valley. His father was a graduate of Harvard who had settled in East Windsor, Connecticut. Young Edwards, who was born in 1703, went to the infant college of Yale, was graduated there, remained on as a tutor for a year or so (acting virtually as president of the college during its distressed time), and, after a year in New York at a Presbyterian church, settled in Northampton, Massachusetts, as successor to his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, who was one of the most noted preachers of his period.

Gross: He was still quite young, wasn't he?

Johnson: He was still in his twenties. And he began his service in Northampton by following, at first, his grandfather's method of allowing church membership, which was known as the Half-Way Covenant. During the early years of the eighteenth century the number of church members began seriously to decline, because the method by which they had to declare their conversion was so difficult that they didn't trust their senses. Stoddard made it possible for them to become church members in the *hope* that they would be converted. But Edwards felt, after he had rethought the situation, that that was not the way to do it.

Gross: This is where he reverses his grandfather, as you have pointed out. Is this possibly why Parrington, in his *Main Currents in American Thought*, refers to Edwards as an anachronism? Was he really trying to turn the clock back?

Faust: I'm sure that's what Parrington had in mind—and in one sense, of course, since this was a return to an earlier way of granting church membership, Edwards does look like a conservative. But I think it's a great injustice to suppose that all Edwards did was to turn back the clock, recover an earlier Calvinism, announce it, and urge it. I think a better way of picturing him is as a man who *reinterpreted* Calvinism. In fact, the movement he began in Northampton came to be known as "New Light" Calvinism, and it aroused as much

opposition from conservative Calvinist theologians and ministers as it did from the liberal wing in American theology.

Gross: To go back to his life for a moment, I think we have to remember that Northampton was, well, not exactly the frontier at this point, but still pretty much of a self-contained rural community. To go from Northampton to Boston, for example, as Edwards did once, was really quite a journey, wasn't it?

Faust: Yes, it was a major occasion.

Gross: I've always been fascinated by Edwards' living as a clergyman in this relatively small town, and yet reaching out to philosophers and theologians all over the world. He had a steady correspondence with the Church of Scotland, didn't he? Wasn't he always arguing points back and forth? And he seems to have been very much alive to the intellectual currents of his day.

Faust: It becomes, I think, even more striking when he moves to Stockbridge.

Gross: Which was even less of a town.

Faust: This was a real frontier town. Here he is a missionary to the Indians, instructing Indian boys and teaching them to read, while at the same time he is writing this tremendous metaphysical treatise on *Freedom of Will* and reading all the current psychologists and historians, on what must have been as close to the frontier as one could get.

Johnson: He had had to leave Northampton because, having reversed his grandfather's position on church membership, the influential citizens of the town were unwilling to let him continue. But Edwards was the kind of man who, whatever he did, did it from integrity; he was perfectly willing to become a missionary to a real outpost. It's interesting that his reputation by that time was so great that he was selected to be president of Princeton and moved there in January of 1758, three months before his death from an inoculation—wasn't it?—for smallpox. He now lies buried in Princeton.

Gross: In the middle of his Northampton period, around the late 1730's and the early 1740's, there was a great revival movement in New England, called the Great Awakening. It is associated with some itinerant preachers, both from England and other parts of the colonies. What was Edwards' position with respect to it?

Johnson: Edwards' position is particularly interesting. Although he is thought of as a conservative and a great logician, he believed that any religious emotion that was valid must come from the heart, and so he supported revivals against the opposition of the Boston rationalists.

Faust: It seems to me that the striking thing about his support of the revival movement is that he was convinced that the essence of religion was of the heart, rather than an intellectual matter. At the same time, he was prying into the most profound of intellectual problems and writing dissertations on freedom of the will, the nature of virtue, original sin, and even the purpose of Creation in general. It's this fusing of the intellectual and the emotional which gives him a unique position.

Gross: Isn't that also true of his own accounts of his religious experiences? In his diary, for example, he tells about going for a walk in the woods or a ride on his horse and having these emotional experiences—feeling himself in communion with God and being able to describe it exactly. He has a feeling of extreme sweetness. This is not something that we normally associate with the name of Edwards and all his stern and rigorous—well, is Calvinism the word or isn't it? I don't know! But in any case, we've got here a man who clearly thinks of religion as involving emotional transformation. It's the heart, as you said, not merely the mind that is operating.

Johnson: Yes, it is. "Sweetness" is a word that he very often uses. It was a sense of the infinite goodness of spirit that he was given.

Faust: Once again we have an interesting polarity that we need to look at. On the one hand he is overwhelmed with a sense of the greatness of the universe, its sweetness, its magnificence; he looks upon it, to use his own words, with a peculiar relish. On the other hand, what appalls him is the fact that man is so impartially related to this totality—that man as a limited, finite, self-interested creature is not in union, in communication, with this magnificence. As a result, he can treat of sinners in the hands of an angry God, picturing the horror of their isolation, and at the same time be overwhelmed by the sweetness and the totality of things.

Gross: That's an interesting point. Do you think that that is a way in which he differs from, let's say, Calvin himself? You read the *Institutes* of Calvin and you don't find much mention of this sweetness or of love. It seems to be a much harsher, a more rigorous doctrine that's being put forward. Of course, you can find harshness in Edwards, too, but there is also this tremendous feeling of the magnificence of it all, of the relish that one takes in it, of the sweetness one finds—all those words that he keeps using. How would you relate him to Calvin? He himself says that he is a Calvinist, he puts himself in the main stream of Calvinism, and yet he indicates many points at which he would disagree.

Faust: I suppose that it is important to relate him to Calvinism as a "New Light" Calvinist. For the Calvinists of Edwards' day, the relation of man to God was, as they put it, a covenant relation. It was a kind of contract into which man could enter: in return for certain assurances, promises, and behavior on his part, the Deity responded favorably to him. Now, the difficulty in this, from Edwards' point of view, was that it put man and God on a par. They were partners in a contract. They could bargain as human beings bargain, and man could regard his relation to the Deity in the same way that he looked on a contract between himself and his neighbor for the purchase of a house or for some business arrangement. Edwards' view makes God so all-inclusive, so tremendously omnipotent with respect to the control and the totality of things, that he couldn't conceive of such a simple relationship between man and the Deity.

Gross: And in some of his sermons he certainly portrays man as the kind of person God would hardly enter into a contract with;

man is called a spider and a loathsome creature and everything else. It puts man right back in his place again, doesn't it?

Johnson: Edwards didn't write *Freedom of Will* until after he had left Northampton. It was published in 1754. One of the reasons he wrote it, I think, is that he had to come to feel that the contemporary deists, the Arminians, were giving man too high a place in the scheme of affairs. They tended to believe in a progress that Edwards felt just simply wasn't basic to the nature of man. He felt that man had limits, and he set about to explain what those limits were.

Gross: Now, this treatise on *Freedom of Will*, just to abbreviate its title—the full title is about a mile long . . .

Johnson: Yes!

Gross: It is not only a systematic statement of Edwards' position, but it's also a piece of polemical writing. What is the actual argument of the Arminians that Edwards feels constrained to attack?

Faust: The problem is how far the human race is able to determine for itself its future and its courses of action. Overawed with a sense of human beings as only a small part of the great texture of the universe, Edwards argues against those eighteenth-century deists who supposed that there was a great deal of good in man, that he could by proper instruction be led to improve himself and improve society, that things were in man's hands; he argues, as well, against those Calvinists who supposed that if man just thought hard enough about the truths of religion, his actions would be in accordance with his insights and he could make progress. Edwards, on the other hand, believes that what man does, what he wants to do, or what choices he makes, is not in his own hands: all of these are caused by the large forces of the universe outside himself. The essence of his argument is that when man makes a decision, there must be a source for it; if the source is in some earlier decision of his own, then there has to be a source for *that*. Ultimately, the source of all that we do, all that we want to do, all that we project or plan—all of our actions—lies in the forces of the universe outside ourselves. Thus, he arrives at this interesting view that, although it's true that we can do as we please, we're not able to determine what's going to please us. This is a consequence of what we now would call our conditioning, our temperament—of the forces outside ourselves. He denies to man's will the possibility of determining for the individual or society the course of events.

Gross: Of course, what he really does is to eliminate the will altogether— isn't that true? He converts the will into inclination or choice, whichever you like.

Johnson: Yes, he does, and there's the crux of the thing. He divides necessity into two parts, and for convenience I'll use his own terms and then explain them briefly. He speaks of "natural" necessity. Well, we understand that: it simply means that if I want to get through a door, I have to open the door, I can't materialize myself through it. Then he speaks of "moral" necessity. For example, if I want to write a cops-and-robbers detective story with a modern setting, I've got to use equipment from a modern armory: it's got to be

some kind of high-powered gun. I can't—no matter how much I may want to do it—use a bow and arrow or a flintlock; people simply wouldn't find that it made any sense. Or if I want to wear a powdered wig, I can only do it at a masquerade—simply because in the historical setting in which we find ourselves today, people don't use flintlocks and they don't wear powdered wigs.

Gross: But, of course, the thing that Edwards has got to answer here is the contention of his opponents, the Arminians, that you have no reason to praise people for being good or to blame them for being bad unless they've done it voluntarily. If the forces which led them to behave as they did are beyond their control, then praise and blame make no sense.

Faust: That is the difficulty in determining the freedom of the will, as Edwards himself recognizes. We may be either free or not free under "natural" necessity—that is to say, if I'm locked in jail, I'm under a physical necessity I can't overcome; if the door is open, I'm free to go out. But there's another kind of pressure on my decisions, too: it comes from my own mind, from my own temperament, and it may make me incapable of performing certain good actions or certain vicious ones. Even when I choose to do something without any external physical pressure on me to do it, or not to do it, I'm still under "moral" necessity—and this is conditioned by my background, my conditioning, my temperament. One may object, "But if that's true, if all I do is determined by conditions that I can't control, then I shouldn't be praised when I do good or blamed when I do evil." Edwards' answer to this, I think, is the most interesting part of his dissertation on *Freedom of Will*. Would you agree?

Johnson: I certainly would. The whole thing is a study of the human heart, and its conclusion is that the motives of man are unfathomable.

Gross: Of course, what he's been saying all along is that it's a certain type of character, a person with certain habits, who operates under this moral necessity. What you're praising and blaming, if you're making any sense at all, is not an individual act; you're praising or blaming a person for being the kind of person he is. A person has built up a virtuous character or a vicious character, and his actions are determined by that character. When Edwards says, for example, that the will follows the greatest apparent good, the real question is what kind of person are you that the thing you choose should apparently be good. Is that correct or not?

Faust: It seems to me that he presents some arguments very difficult to brush aside on this point. He points out that if God is worthy of praise even though, by consequence of His character, He is unable to perform evil acts, then, obviously, we are not assigning praise or blame on the grounds of a choice between good or evil. Again, in the case of a very virtuous person we admire, we may feel that his character is so formed that it would be impossible for him to do a vicious thing. Now, should we praise him less because he is under the necessity of his good moral character to perform good actions?

Gross: In other words, God Himself is under the highest moral necessity to do good. Even so, Edwards thinks it ridiculous to feel that praise of God should be at all diminished because He is incapable of doing evil.

Johnson: Yes, Edwards' whole concept is that what a man perceives, so is he; that is to say, the perception is not in the import of the object, it is as the object is seen. If I did not know what a book is for, if I were in darkest Africa, it might be useful to me as kindling or I might throw it at my enemy, but that doesn't mean it's any less a book; it's simply that I hadn't known what it was. Similarly, the lesser good act is lesser because of the blindness of the one who is incapable of perceiving it.

Gross: We're really at a doctrine which is quite similar to St. Augustine's doctrine of the grace of God being like illumination; it opens up new vistas to us—and that's where we get this sense of the tremendous majesty and sweetness of revelation which I come back to. But as I understand it, then, Edwards' conception is that you need the grace of God, you need an act of conversion of some sort, in order to have your eyes opened. The main trouble with man is that Adam had this vision opened to him and turned away from it. I think Edwards says that when Adam turned away from the good, it was like a candle being taken out of the room—and we've been in the darkness ever since, except insofar as we get grace through conversion.

Faust: As the old Calvinistic doctrine of original sin is analyzed by Edwards, it is in the very terms we've been discussing. That is, when Adam was created he had two sets of impulses; one inclined him to take care of himself, an impulse of self-love . . .

Gross: That was the natural man.

Faust: The natural man. And the other was an impulse to relate himself to other human beings and to the totality of the universe—what Edwards calls the impulses toward benevolence. Equipped with both of these, once Adam had made a selfish choice, God withdrew from him all of the impulses for benevolence and left him "in a darkness that was as though a candle had been carried out of a room." There's something very modern about this notion that everything men do is determined by their own self-interest, unless—and this is the religious element in Edwards—unless a new set of impulses is somehow infused and introduced. This is the process of conversion or regeneration—he takes this word very literally; a new creature, he says, is formed with a new set of impulses quite above those that the natural man entertained.

Gross: And, of course, he makes the famous statement that the will follows the last dictates of the understanding. Now, that's perfectly valid if in "the understanding" we include this aspect of the heart as well as the aspect of the mind. It seems to me that Edwards gets rid of the will by identifying it with desires, or what he calls the heart. And it's that change of heart that is essential in order to return to the state of grace that Adam was in before the Fall.

Johnson: One of the things that interests me most about that

very great essay on original sin is how he bridged the debt which we today owe—traditionally speaking—for Adam's fall. He does it—and it's really a great intellectual leap, I think—through the interpretation of the word "identity." Today I am not composed of any of the same cells I was composed of, say, ten or twenty years ago, but I am the same person, with the same responsibility toward what I then was or what I then did. Similarly, we are responsible for what has happened in the past; we are identified with it.

Faust: Could we say that, in a way, the very heart of Edwards is the fashion in which he relates himself to the totality of the existing universe and the totality of history? He's not content to feel that he's following his own opinions or the opinions of his group or of society. What he really wants to know is where do *I* belong in this enormous, eternally-existing universe and this long sweep of history?

Johnson: That is the profound contribution of Edwards to philosophy. It is the reason why he is today more modern than any of his contemporaries and, in one sense, still the greatest philosopher and theologian ever produced in this country.

Faust: In our day we are groping for certainty: should we get it by Gallup Polls of general opinion, should we get it by accepting a tradition of the last century or two, or should we find our certainty by reaching out into the totality of history and the universe?

Gross: I think what we're saying is that Edwards faces the hard facts of his own community, his own country, and so on, but at the same time he makes connections between these hard facts and the broadest, most universal philosophical principles. Very few people could have done it as he has.

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SELF-REVELATION

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Sonnets

(As broadcast April 3, 1955)

MARCHETTE CHUTE

• MAURICE DOLBIER

• MASON GROSS

Gross: We're starting off a new series with the general theme of self-revelation, and our first subject is Shakespeare's sonnets. It seems to me that we run into a problem right away. Are these sonnets self-revelation? If so, what self do they reveal? But perhaps we should take a few moments to place them in context. They were published, I believe, about 1609?

Chute: Yes.

Gross: Did Shakespeare himself turn them over for publication, or did somebody else?

Chute: Shakespeare never seemed to pay any attention to publication, and I'd say particularly not in the case of the sonnets. Even the proofreading is bad. The publisher, Thomas Thorpe, claimed that he got them from the man to whom the sonnets were written.

Dolbier: That's the famous Mr. W. H.?

Chute: Yes.

Dolbier: "The onlie begetter of these insuing sonnets . . ."

Gross: Can we use 1609 as a date when they were written, roughly? Shakespeare would then be—what? About 45 years old?

Chute: Yes, but I would think it was almost impossible that they were written as late as that, because the whole tone belongs to the last decade of the sixteenth century.

Gross: How do you determine that?

Chute: In the first place, nearly all the sonnet sequences were written then. From about 1590 to 1600 there was a flood of every kind of sonnet sequence; almost every major poet wrote one, and by the middle of the decade they had become so popular that somebody produced an entire book of parodies of them.

Dolbier: Then Shakespeare's publisher came in at the end of a trend?

Chute: That's what happened. He was a small-time operator who got hold of the manuscript. It wasn't a very successful publication: there was no second edition until much later.

Gross: Were the sonnets known, Mr. Dolbier, before then? Does this book in 1609 first present Shakespeare as a writer of sonnets?

Dolbier: I must say that almost everything I know about the history of Shakespeare's sonnets comes from Miss Chute's book, *Shakespeare of London*. I do know that Shakespeare had been known for his poetry earlier than he had been for his plays, that he had written some quite successful poetry before becoming a successful

playwright, and that he also used the sonnet form in his earlier plays.

Gross: The mystery that seems to surround these things fascinates me. I don't think we want to become detectives, but certainly these sonnets have been attributed to all kinds of possible authors, haven't they? Who were some of the better known?

Dolbier: Well, almost as many people have been credited with writing the sonnets as have been suspected of being Shakespeare. I think the wheel is coming full circle: there's more belief now that the person who wrote the plays and wrote the sonnets was an actor from Stratford named William Shakespeare.

Chute: I think a really fiercer argument is raised over whom the sonnets were written to—the identity of Mr. W. H.

Gross: And then there's the mystery of "the dark lady of the sonnets," the mystery of the rival poet who is referred to in the sonnets, and so on.

Dolbier: The dark lady is rather a minor mystery, though, isn't she? Mr. W. H. is the chief figure in most of the sonnets.

Chute: I think the leading contender for W. H. has always been William Herbert, the Earl of Pembroke, because the First Folio was dedicated to him and it speaks of the favors he bestowed on Shakespeare. As a result of that, Mary Fitton has always been identified by the majority party with "the dark lady of the sonnets." It shows how curiously tenuous the whole business is. The facts are that in 1601 Herbert did have an affair with Mary Fitton; she bore him a child, and it was hushed up by a land grant. Not until two years later is there any evidence that Shakespeare and Herbert ever met; all that happened then was that Shakespeare's company gave a performance at the Earl's country house, because the court couldn't meet in London owing to the plague. The only mention of Herbert after that is in the First Folio, where he's thanked for favors to Shakespeare (at the same time, he's thanked for favors to everyone in the company). And, of course, what had happened was that he'd become Lord Chamberlain and was now running the drama for the court.

Dolbier: Has the Willie Hughes theory gone out of favor?

Chute: Yes—perhaps because no one ever liked the idea of a commoner. Everyone seemed to want Shakespeare to be the friend of a nobleman.

Gross: Is that partly because the writing of sonnet sequences was conceived as an aristocratic pastime?

Chute: They weren't really, because most of the writers of sonnets in the 1590s, like Daniel and Lodge and Barnabe Barnes, were ordinary popular writers. The great sonnet sequence most popular at the period was that of Sir Philip Sidney—but he, of course, always ranked higher as a writer than anyone else from the Elizabethan point of view.

Gross: The sonnet itself, I suppose, is an importation from Italy, on the incoming tide of the Renaissance. And you seem to indicate that it had a fairly brief period of fashion, mostly the last decade of the sixteenth century.

Chute: England always got these things very late: the Channel

seemed to be protecting it from the full force of the Renaissance. But it began with Petrarch. His first great influence was, of course, in France; later it spread to England with Wyatt and Surrey, but their sonnets didn't have very much effect. Interest revived in the 1580s—Thomas Watson was the first—and then a perfect flood. Everyone took them up, I suppose because they sold well.

Gross: Are the sonnets of this period all in the same form? Here we have three quatrains—three little units of four lines each—and a rhyming couplet to conclude them. Is that the usual form? Because later on it tightens up, doesn't it, and acquires a much stricter rhyming scheme?

Chute: Yes. I rather think that, on the whole, the Elizabethans were not happy with a very strict form. Their genius lay in a kind of effervescence.

Dolbier: Shakespeare certainly isn't noted—in his plays, at least—for strict adherence to any kind of form.

Chute: You agree, then, that Shakespeare wasn't happy with a strict form?

Dolbier: Not happy. I think he works within the limitations of a form and does wonders with it. For example, certain patterns had been set very tightly in the sonnet form—the emphasis on change and contrast, the references to mythological figures, and so on. Shakespeare took all these clichés and turned them into miracles in many of his sonnets.

Gross: Some, of course, didn't come off.

Dolbier: No, not all of them. But so often acquaintance with the sonnets consists merely of a knowledge of the first line—from reading indexes of first lines, perhaps.

Gross: Or of second lines, from which people have stolen titles for their own books.

Dolbier: Well, here's one that not only has a title in it (there's a recent novel called *Rough Winds of May*), but I believe the first line became a popular song at one time:

*Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou growest:
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this and this gives life to thee.*

Chute: And this peculiarly beautiful expression of the immortality given through words comes out of what was fundamentally a rather cheap thing in the Renaissance. These poets were all trying

very hard to get patrons, and the only really strong argument they had was this: "If you let me write about you, I'll make you immortal." Out of that rather commonplace idea, which the whole hierarchy of Renaissance poets repeats over and over again, Shakespeare made a miracle.

Gross: The poet cannily makes *himself* immortal.

Dolbier: Presumably, the purpose of a Renaissance sonnet is to influence someone. It can be, as you say, to influence a patron. It can also be to influence a loved one. In Shakespeare you have that, too, but on such a plane as no other Elizabethan poet—well, who since then?—was able to put it.

Gross: Of course, it's rather ambiguous in Shakespeare, isn't it? Sometimes he suggests that whatever time may do to destroy the beauty of a loved one, at least his lines will give immortality. That's the argument we've just been mentioning. At other times Shakespeare takes precisely the opposite tack and says that his lines could never adequately describe or do real justice to the beauty of the loved one.

Chute: And that's why the first group of sonnets asks for the loved one to get married, so that he can pass on his beauty—which is an odd point of view in the twentieth century, but a very common one in the Renaissance.

Dolbier: Would you say that one common theme which runs all through these sonnets is the hope of immortality to counter the destructiveness and the ravages of time? What time does is a recurring theme all the way through, isn't it?

Chute: What time does to destroy *beauty*. Beauty and youth are always considered together in the poems, and the hope is that something will stop the ravages of time.

Dolbier: Is this a literary conceit taken over from the Italians or the French, or is it a revelation of Shakespeare's own fundamental pessimism?

Chute: I would suspect that it goes as far back as poets go—that sense of the flower fading, of nothing to hold it back, of the destructiveness of time.

Dolbier: It's certainly a general theme in Greek poetry.

Chute: And moreover the poets are right, because words *do* last, they do outweigh time.

Gross: One is always aware of this peculiar absorption with the notion of the destructiveness of time. Take, for example, the sonnet that follows the one that Mr. Dolbier just read:

*Devouring Time, blunt thou the lion's paws,
And make the earth devour her own sweet brood . . .*

Chute: It's a beautiful thing.

Gross: It's a magnificent sonnet, ending with the couplet:

*Yet, do thy worst, old Time: despite thy wrong,
My love shall in my verse ever live young.*

Shakespeare's attitude seems to be that destructiveness is inevitable; he can talk about the kinds of immortality that might come, but he's more absorbed in the destruction of beauty itself.

Dolbier: Yes. You never believe the rhymed couplet half so strongly as you believe the earlier references to the ravages of time.

Gross: The couplets give a graceful little fillip at the end, but at times they seem to let down the truly serious mood of the first three quatrains.

Chute: I think one reason for this obsession with decay is that in the late Renaissance it was outward beauty that fascinated them most, the beauty of face and form and dimension. It was a great period of decoration and ornament. In their poetry, the emphasis is always on the outward loveliness that time is destroying. That's one reason why *Let me not to the marriage of true minds* is so beautiful.

Gross: I wish we could look at that one for a moment. It's one of the most familiar.

Dolbier: This is one where more than the first line is widely known. It's also one in which you have a rather weak rhymed couplet at the end, as we've mentioned before:

*Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.*

Chute: I wouldn't say that was a weak ending.

Gross: But you think it's a weak ending, Mr. Dolbier?

Dolbier: I think it is—in comparison with "the edge of doom," which rounds it off so majestically.

Chute: But then he trumps it with almost casual talk.

Dolbier: It does bring a personal sense into a sonnet that deals with all humankind.

Chute: And there he is saying that love can conquer time, although elsewhere he says that beauty cannot. He speaks as though beauty's strength is no more than the flower's, and that, like a flower, it has to depend on reproduction in order to keep itself alive.

Gross: As to that last couplet, though, I'm inclined to agree with Mr. Dolbier. It's almost a signing-off, as though he were more or less saying, "Well, I tried to say what I mean."

Dolbier: It's dangerous to agree with me, Mr. Gross, because I change my mind so quickly.

Chute: That's why I asked you earlier if you thought that he was happy in the sonnet form. The poet has to like the limitations of his art, whatever they may be. And, of course, there was much less space in a sonnet than in a play.

Gross: Well, take another very familiar one:

*When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past . . .*

Dolbier: Another book title.

Gross: Yes. Now, in this one you have the word "woe," you have "doom," you have the phrase "fore-bemoanèd moan." Those long O-sounds are depressing; the thing is heavy. I don't mean heavy in an unbeautiful sense—I think it's one of the most beautiful of the sonnets—but it's rich and heavy. And then you end up:

*But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restored and sorrows end.*

And I just don't believe . . .

Dolbier: There I'm on your side!

Gross: Everything is used with the greatest skill to build up a single mood—the rhythm of the poem, the words, the vowel sounds—and then he throws it all away in the last couplet.

Dolbier: Well, that's a standard practice in sonneteering—to write magnificently until you reach the rhymed couplet, and then toss it away.

Chute: In this particular case, the point he's making is that "I am profoundly melancholy, I feel terrible." Then, at the end, it changes to "I don't feel terrible any more because I'm thinking of you." The ending reflects the shift in mood.

Dolbier: Now we're getting back to self-revelation. You say the sonnet implies that "I feel terrible." I think it also implies—this is probably accidental—that "I don't feel too terrible because I am a poet who can make all those O's do their work so well." I wonder how much self-revelation there is in this; did he really feel terrible, or was he just doing a wonderful job of craftsmanship?

Chute: If Shakespeare didn't sometimes enjoy feeling terrible, he's the only human being who never did.

Dolbier: Many of these sound as though he had felt terrible sometime in the past, but now was looking back, in maturity, and remaking his emotions into works of art.

Chute: Of course, the question hinges on when he wrote them. And again it's impossible to tell, because in some sonnets he speaks of his own antiquity, as though he were practically on the threshold of death. But if they were written in the 1590s, he would be only in his thirties.

Dolbier: In the Elizabethan age many people *were* at the point of death in their thirties.

Gross: At times these things seem almost too accomplished. Shakespeare is always the artist with words. For example, this line: *And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste*. That's a brilliantly skillful bit of rhetoric.

Dolbier: May I bring up a line that I've discovered? I'm always making discoveries about these poems. A few minutes ago I came across a line that I'd never seen before, and would certainly have never paid much attention to, in which he uses five U-sounds

magnificently. They are the commonest words, but words you would not expect to find in a work of poetry of the period: *And on just proof surmise accumulate.*

Gross: That's an interesting one, yes.

Chute: Of course, it was a period that was drunk on words; they loved them with real passion, all England did, the same way they loved music. They had very quick ears.

Gross: It seems perfectly clear to me that the person who wrote these sonnets must be the same person who wrote the plays. You've got the same kind of fascination with words and sounds, and the same delight in playing tricks with the words you use.

Dolbier: You often find the same groupings of words in both the plays and the sonnets. There is, for instance, in *Hamlet* a line about "this fell sergeant, Death" being "strict in his arrest"; there is, in one of the sonnets, a reference to "death's fell arrest."

Chute: There are legal images throughout Shakespeare, but that, again, was a constant factor in the period. The Elizabethans were always rushing off to lawsuits.

Dolbier: Shakespeare was a fairly familiar figure around the Inns of Court, wasn't he?

Chute: Yes, and it isn't too difficult to pick up that sort of material.

Gross: But you don't find much legal terminology in the sonnets, do you? I didn't notice that myself.

Chute: What about all the references to leases and usury? Or to pleading and verdicts in Number 46? Now that's a legal sonnet, really.

Gross: I hadn't thought of that, but of course Number 46 is all legal:

*But the defendant doth that plea deny
And says in him thy fair appearance lies.
To 'cide this title is impanneled
A quest of thoughts, all tenants to the heart,
And by their verdict is determined . . .*

Dolbier: Knowing nothing about legal terminology in this age, let alone in the Elizabethan age, that sonnet doesn't mean very much to me.

Gross: But in most of them you get an amazing distillation of experience; I don't know of any other poetry where the words themselves grab hold of you and take you right into the mood of the poem instantly.

Chute: And the compactness! He packs such an extraordinary amount into a small area.

Dolbier: This is the time, I think, to bring in a quotation from John Keats, who, being a poet himself, felt very much the same way. He had been reading the sonnets again, and said in one of his letters, "I never found so many beauties in the sonnets; they seem to be full of fine things said unintentionally, in the intensity of working out conceits. Is this to be borne?" This was a cry from Keats' heart: "He has left nothing to say about anything." And so many poets,

not only Keats, have felt the same way about Shakespeare, as I presume many Germans have felt about Goethe.

Chute: He said everything so perfectly that it seems like a final statement.

Gross: Of course, that brings up an interesting point about the way in which history and criticism have dealt with the sonnets—all this “detective work” that we were talking about. The nineteenth century seems to have taken the sonnets very seriously. Was it the Romantic movement that brought the sonnets back into popularity?

Chute: Yes, I think most of Shakespeare’s current reputation stems from the nineteenth century. The classic tradition was still dear to the eighteenth century; *they* wanted something tidier and more orderly and more level.

Gross: In the eighteenth century they even rewrote Shakespeare’s plays.

Chute: Yes.

Gross: Which makes all the more remarkable what Dr. Johnson was able to see in them. But when you say the nineteenth century, what do you mean in particular?

Chute: I would say it starts with Coleridge—about in there. Unfortunately, that was also the time when the excitement over Shakespearean biography began, and the desire to connect him with the aristocracy.

Dolbier: That has never died down since, has it?

Chute: No, that has never died down since. It’s an effort to honor him, I suppose, so there’s no harm in it.

Gross: No, that’s true. But I thought perhaps you meant they tried to read deeper meanings into the sonnets than are there. Perhaps we’re wrong in looking for self-revelation in them; this man is primarily a musician singing his songs, using traditional conceits and traditional ideas, and we make a mistake in trying to find too many deeper meanings.

Chute: If you take the 154 sonnets as a whole, I think that would be true, because there are many levels of writing. Some of them are nothing in the world but little word games, such as the two final ones with their talk of Cupid and “growing a bath.”

Gross: Or the two that make heavy puns on “Will” all the way through fourteen lines.

Dolbier: And there are a few that pun in the same way with the name Rose.

Chute: That’s just word-play, and very fashionable at the time. It means nothing as poetry. But then you come to sonnets of such profound intensity that any period could find their image in them.

Gross: For example:

Full many a glorious morning have I seen

Flatter the mountain-tops with sovereign eye . . .

That’s the same really triumphant use of language that we find in the plays. Or this one:

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,

So do our minutes hasten to their end . . .

That could be the beginning of a soliloquy from one of the plays; it's on the same deep level of seriousness.

Chute: I think that sometimes we fail to appreciate the emotional excitement of the Renaissance, which is so evident in these sonnets—a sense of over-feeling, almost, of over-expression . . .

Gross: Do you mean, for example, the constant praise of beauty in all creatures, male or female, young or old?

Chute: Yes. It's rather like a young man in the springtime: everything is so important to him.

Dolbier: Could it be said that Shakespeare reveals to us less of himself and more of ourselves?

Chute: That's a beautiful way of putting it.

Gross: That, I suppose, is the secret of poetry; some poets like Shakespeare, do it more skillfully than others, though it's surprising that a man who spread himself through those great, magnificent plays could compress his genius into a fourteen-line poem.

Dolbier: There is compression in the plays, too.

Gross: Yes, of course, but still you feel that he had all the world to play with.

Dolbier: He has all the world to play with in the sonnets, too, and does play with it.

Gross: Do you find the sonnets more satisfactory than his other poems, such as *The Rape of Lucrece* or *Venus and Adonis*?

Chute: Oh, yes; those were really written to a pattern.

Gross: They were written more or less at the same time?

Chute: Probably, yes. They can be dated quite closely: 1592 and 1593. But they were merely in a fashionable local form.

Dolbier: As for the sonnets, we don't know when he wrote them, whom he wrote them to, in what order he wrote them, or how much of himself he revealed in them. Outside of that, I don't know what can be said except to go and read them.

Chute: We do know how much we love them!

Gross: It's true of any poetry: you must go back to it and read it. And with Shakespeare's sonnets, it seems to me that you must read them aloud in order to enjoy to the fullest their magnificent music.

THEODORE DREISER

An American Tragedy

(As broadcast April 10, 1955)

HARVEY BREIT

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MARGARET MEAD

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MASON GROSS

Gross: This novel is set forth as *An American Tragedy*. I think, if we're going to understand what Theodore Dreiser was

trying to do, we should examine that right at the beginning. This is a pretty ambitious title, isn't it?

Mead: He tried to make it universal, at least for the American scene, and in a sense he succeeded astonishingly well. It's a story of the way rootless people, torn from meager, poverty-stricken beginnings, get lost when they try to move up through the American scene in the anonymity of one of our industrial towns. Even Dreiser can't make up his mind that the hero—I don't know whether we should really call him a hero or not . . .

Gross: The leading character, perhaps?

Mead: That's better—the leading character, Clyde Griffiths. When he's finally tried for murder, you're never quite sure whether he committed the murder or whether it is society that's responsible.

Gross: That's a tragedy, of course, but is it an *American* tragedy? . . .

Mead: Yes, I think it is.

Breit: This novel is clearly laid in the American scene, and we have all of Dreiser's brilliant reporting skill in reconstructing it. This book starts in Kansas City, doesn't it? The family is a rootless one. They've been torn away from their origins, and we find them in what is a sort of Salvation Army setup. Young Clyde is unhappily trapped in this scheme of things, and early in life is eager to break away. He's ashamed and embarrassed in a way that quite possibly haunts him for the rest of his life.

Mead: Don't you think it's important, though, to realize that this is *not* the Salvation Army, which is an organized, respected part of American life where people sustain each other? This is a little street mission, all on its own.

Breit: Yes, unorganized.

Mead: Unordained . . . unrespected!

Breit: With four children trailing along behind the parents. One of them comes to a bad end—the older daughter, I believe—and Clyde runs away. He goes off and finds a job as a bellhop in a hotel, where you get all those very striking and, it seems to me, amazingly detailed accounts of the life of a bellboy.

Gross: Do you think Dreiser was a bellboy once?

Breit: I don't know, but I'm fairly sure that he got the thing down absolutely cold. He knew what bellboys did and how they felt and how they functioned, and you certainly get a pretty grim picture of a hotel. I was about to say "a hotel of the period," but this brings up another question—what is the period? The book was written in 1925, wasn't it?

Mead: I tried for forty pages, keeping notes, to figure out just what the period was. You can't tell.

Gross: Let me see—*Sister Carrie*, his first novel, came out in 1900, didn't it?

Breit: The first edition was printed in 1900, but the publisher held it up; it wasn't issued publicly until 1912. In *An American Tragedy* he could be dramatizing his memories of any period from 1900 to 1925.

Mead: Except for the automobile.

Gross: The automobile?

Mead: Lots of people in the book are described as driving very elegant limousines—many more than would have had them in 1900.

Gross: But he seems to be deliberately suppressing references to time. That may be part of his conscious attempt to generalize this into an American tragedy—not just the particular history of Clyde Griffiths.

Breit: Yes—I was going to go back to the title, too, in order to give Dreiser the benefit of design at this point. To return to the story: we've got Clyde as far as the hotel. That episode in his career is ended by an automobile accident in which a little girl is killed, although I believe the hero (let's call him that) had no direct connection with it.

Gross: He was sitting in the back of the car.

Breit: Well, it's hung on him for the rest of his life, anyway. Then he turns up in the Mohawk valley, working for his rich and successful uncle who runs a collar factory—a type of character, again, that Dreiser seems to handle very well. Clyde starts from the bottom in the collar factory and, if I remember rightly, there's one prohibition, isn't there? A rule that anybody who is related to the owners must have nothing at all to do with the employees. This poor boy is completely isolated from everybody: his rich relatives don't want to see very much of him and he's not allowed to associate with the employees. He's still a rootless character, isn't he?

Mead: But Dreiser makes a very pretty point here: Clyde looks a great deal like his first cousin, the son of this self-made man who owns the collar factory. The son senses a threat, a threat that always exists in America—that somebody will come along and take your place away from you, somebody from the lower orders will move into the club or into the block or into your own occupation. All the way through, the likeness between these two cousins is played up.

Gross: But this rich cousin recognizes the threat even before Clyde arrives on the scene, doesn't he? He hates Clyde with an unrelenting passion right from the very beginning, whereas the rest of the family seem to be at least passively interested in him and not so hostile.

Breit: The cousin is more directly threatened.

Gross: Then we have the introduction of a charming young girl from the country. She is another young person who has torn herself away from her roots. I think that in the heroine—and I'm sure we *do* have a heroine in Roberta Alden—we meet the most sympathetic character in the whole book. Would you agree with that?

Breit: I would, yes. In the whole novel she is the only character that touched me in any way. But that, ironically, is the flaw for me in this novel: that here and there character *does* intrude. It seems to me that the design of this novel requires that there should be no character. That may be difficult to defend, but I think that wherever Dreiser did succeed in creating character, he became a novelist—a good novelist—instead of a man who had set up a fairly disciplined scheme for himself in the terms of this book. Those terms

were that nobody should have an individual character and that it should be an allegory, but he breaks away from allegory occasionally.

Mead: Of course, he was a magnificent observer; if he were working my field, I'd call him a good ethnographer. For instance, in this love affair between Clyde, the young superintendent in the collar factory, and Roberta Alden, the attractive American girl from a fundamentally religious background, they're both attracted to each other by a real psychological likeness. Each of them had been offended by the dreariness and meagerness of a home where there were high moral values but ugly surroundings. They fell in love with each other in a way that would make a really good psychological novel.

Gross: I agree.

Mead: But Dreiser completely disregards that in favor of the sociological points he wants to make, and so he has Clyde tempted by this rich, mischievous girl who belongs to his uncle's set.

Gross: Going back to Clyde and Roberta for a moment. I think it should be emphasized that they both have very strong mothers, haven't they? Clyde's mother is a strong woman and a good woman, as far as one can see. His father is completely ineffective. In fact, that's why he's thrown out of the family circle altogether. And the same thing with Roberta: her poor father is totally ineffective, but her mother is a sympathetic character, from what little we see of her.

Mead: That's the standard American plot.

Breit: Isn't the point that, aside from their similarity of background, Clyde and Roberta are both really isolated and lonely? It isn't so much a question of falling in love as it is of two lonely people recognizing in each other some communication for the first time.

Mead: This aspect of the plot is something that one could sympathize with—the revulsion against meagerness, against loneliness, against ugliness, in favor of something that is brighter and wider. But Dreiser symbolizes these brighter and wider things, where Clyde is concerned, in the tawdriness and guilt of the hotel; he's always looking for something tawdry. The whole social scene in this little upstate New York town is drawn very unsympathetically. They're just a bunch of newly-arrived social climbers who are jealous of their position.

Gross: They're all complete wastrels. There's not a single thing to recommend them, as far as one can see, except that maybe a couple of girls are pretty in their way. Certainly their parents are not very sympathetic—except, I think, for the uncle, Mr. Samuel Griffiths, who is on the whole a sympathetic character.

Mead: He built a collar factory, you see, and that makes him a producer and a point of solidity in the American scene.

Gross: His intentions are good, he's tolerant, he's fair, and he doesn't share his son's attitude toward Clyde. Nevertheless, we have a pretty grim picture of this society which Clyde so much aspires to and which finally ruins his whole love affair with Roberta. Thus we get to the tragedy—or was there a tragedy? Roberta had to be got out of the way, presumably?

Breit: I don't think we've mentioned it before, but there's another girl in the picture and her name is Sondra. I don't suppose

Clyde falls in love with her so much as he falls in love with her status, but fall he does. And Roberta, who has become pregnant, has to be got rid of. The climax of the second book of the novel is her murder, or at least her death. It is possible that Clyde, touched by Roberta, has a change of heart at the last moment and decides not to murder her—yet whether he does or doesn't is perfectly ambiguous.

Gross: Determined to follow the pattern of a story in the newspaper, he takes her in a boat out on the lake. The boat will be upset and, since she can't swim, she will be left there to drown. But then he apparently decides *not* to do it, and at that moment Roberta moves toward him, the camera hits her, all kinds of peculiar things happen, the boat is upset—and you don't really know. You're left wondering how much of it, if any, was actually deliberate and willed. I think part of the importance of the third section of the novel is that Clyde himself doesn't seem to know whether he did, finally, murder her.

Mead: He's convicted, though, primarily because of all the steps he'd taken while he *was* daydreaming about murdering her.

Gross: It would be pretty hard for him, wouldn't it, to justify his actions up to that point? Roberta is dead, and every single step that led to this he had deliberately taken.

Mead: He planned it very carefully but very badly, so that there were endless clues that could be used against him—two hats, and all sorts of nonsensical things that would appeal to a writer of detective stories.

Breit: It reminds me of a line from T. S. Eliot in which he says that between the idea and the act—perhaps I'm mixing it up—but between the idea and the act lies a shadow. Although Clyde had planned meticulously the murder, at a certain point he did have a change of heart; the passing from idea to action is something that Dreiser played with.

Mead: And I think that's an American idea, again: we tend to say that if you didn't actually perform the final act, you're not guilty.

Gross: Isn't that probably what Dreiser was getting at? In other words, it was important to him to show that all kinds of forces, in which Clyde Griffiths was just simply a pawn, led to the death of Roberta Alden. Now, if you actually have Clyde willfully and deliberately and consciously and positively murdering her, then it becomes too personal and narrows it down too much.

Breit: It does fix the guilt too patly for Dreiser.

Gross: Then, in the third part, we go through the long circumstance of the discovery of his guilt by the police, and his trial. Dreiser surely must have studied his accounts of murder trials, because this is worked out in the fullest detail—every single word of the defense and the prosecution. This, again, is the reporter, isn't it?

Breit: Yes, very brilliant reporting; maybe a little long, but very brilliant.

Gross: And Clyde's final condemnation by twelve good men and true who, we are told, have pretty well made up their minds long before they ever sit on the jury. And the horrible feeling that comes

over him that everybody and everything is against him. The poor boy is really defeated by that, isn't he? Every single person in the room hates him, everybody in the town hates him, except two or three girls, who wave to him when he's finally taken off to prison.

Breit: And call him a hero.

Gross: Yes. Then we go to prison. And here his mother comes back on the scene. What about her, Miss Mead? How would you characterize the return of the mother?

Mead: I think it symbolizes the idea that if he had stayed with his own roots, he might have had some character—that the one chance he had in life was to stay with his mother. A rather gloomy point, but that in a sense is the way it's set up. Both Roberta and Clyde left their early religious training, which, of course, was "don't smoke, don't drink, don't hold hands"—literally. And the minute they move away, even though they're spurred by an aspiration for something better, they leave behind the sources and possibilities of conscience and of unselfish behavior, because Clyde, particularly, becomes totally selfish. The mother is represented as someone who is selfless—bigoted, meager, unlovely, but totally selfless. She was destroyed because, although she was unordained, she dared to preach on the streets—which, again, is a nice old American theme.

Breit: Perhaps the whole thesis of Dreiser in *An American Tragedy* is that society is anonymous, that owing to any number of factors—the industrial, the social, and so on—it's very difficult for people to survive in it. And it seems to me that he is harboring a kind of deep, perhaps loving but nevertheless deep, grudge against the anonymity of society.

Gross: You sense that feeling in the scene in the death house, and in the delineation of the other murderers. Each is an individual, but each somehow has been overwhelmed by circumstances; again, you don't feel that they've committed individual crimes. And then, finally, Clyde follows along with all the rest of them and is electrocuted. When the last character is gone, the book has to stop, I suppose.

Mead: But the terrible thing is that it doesn't stop. It goes back to a western city where the illegitimate child of Clyde's oldest sister, the fruit of her first sin, is now the little boy following the street organ.

Breit: And he's going to be a bellhop, and he's going to commit a possible murder . . .

Gross: You do get the horrible feeling that, even though the mother claims that she's going to give this grandson more freedom, so that the same thing won't happen to him—she lets him go buy a candy bar, doesn't she?—nevertheless . . .

Mead: That's progress.

Gross: Yes. But it's going to start all over again.

Breit: After the novel was dramatized in a play, the great Russian director Eisenstein came here in order to make a film version of it. The story, not necessarily altogether verified, came out that the Hollywood studio asked Mr. Eisenstein the question, "Was Clyde

Griffiths guilty?" And when Mr. Eisenstein said "Not at all! Society is guilty," the contract was severed.

Gross: How did it actually work out? They did film it, of course, under the title of *A Place in the Sun*.

Breit: That was much later on, an American movie; Eisenstein never did it.

Gross: No. But I was wondering whether Eisenstein's point was finally won, because I do think that Dreiser would have said that society, or at least the whole scheme of things, was guilty—much more than Clyde Griffiths as an individual.

Mead: But that goes against the grain of all our American tradition of individual responsibility! Dreiser certainly attempted to turn Clyde into a pawn—by making the court so venal, by making the whole trial a matter of politics and self-advancement, by making almost all of society just a group of slightly higher-grade pawns. You feel that if you have no education at all and move a little, you'll be a complete pawn—but if you have a little more education, then you become the operator of the machine that is executing this poor boy. All the way through he presents this as a tragedy which no one is responsible for; I think there's no doubt about that. But it goes against the grain of our American tradition, which is to ask: "Did you do something that you could have stopped?"

Gross: To illustrate your point: when you come to the trial itself, it seems to be perfectly clear what's going to happen to Clyde. You see that everybody's against him and there's no defense—even the defense attorneys know that. But still the prosecution has to go and manufacture evidence, such as when they took the hairs from the girl's head and strung them in the camera, so that they would prove that he'd hit her with the camera. Now that seems to me so unnecessarily crooked, but it's the kind of detail that recurs all the way through the account of the trial.

Mead: Don't you think, though, that Dreiser is making the point that there is no justice? In this trial there is nothing anybody can rely on. If there had been one lawyer or one sheriff or one policeman who was interested in accuracy and impartiality—but the whole thing is a mixture of phoniness, forgery and ambiguity.

Breit: But they are all acting according to their beliefs—they believe that Clyde Griffiths is guilty, and so they stack the evidence against him. They plant the hairs, they augment their idea by deliberate lies and contrivances of every kind.

Gross: A few moments ago Miss Mead made the point that we are reluctant to accept the notion that society has as much responsibility as the individual. I think this reluctance is beautifully illustrated by the clergyman who appears at the end with Mrs. Griffiths. He is very sympathetic to Clyde; he sees all the forces that operated against him. But when the Governor, from whom he's trying to get a pardon for Clyde, asks him if there's any evidence to show that this boy is *not* guilty, he disappears. He can't follow through with it, because he's got to fix personal blame somewhere and there's no one to fix it on but Clyde himself.

Mead: It's a very western, very Protestant, very puritanical position, in which the clergyman sways between pity for the entire human race and the recognition that each man is a participant in every other man's murder.

Breit: Well, Miss Mead, from a purely scientific point of view, could you say that Clyde Griffiths *did* murder Roberta?

Mead: What kind of scientist do you want me to be? I've been wondering what I would have thought about this book in 1925, if I had read it when it came out. What interests me here is what we can say about conscience and guilt *now* that we wouldn't have thought of then. The point of these two, Roberta and Clyde, is that their whole conscience structure had been so narrow and so meager that it didn't hold together when they moved away from their origins; in becoming socially mobile and going into larger communities, they lost the core of their consciences and became, in a sense, people without personal continuity. Whether you can say that someone with Clyde's discontinuity of personality did or did not commit the murder is the sort of problem, I think, that one would raise if by science you mean psychology. Now, if by scientific you mean a close, objective analysis of photographs and tape recordings, the answer would be quite different.

Breit: Yes. But what morality would condemn Clyde if, at the point of the murder, he did have a change of heart and didn't want to kill her? She moves toward him, the boat capsizes, he tries to rescue her, he swings his arm to catch her, the camera is in his hand and hits her on the head, she topples over, he does not try to save her . . .

Mead: Then it's a sin of omission.

Gross: It seems to me rather like setting a house on fire in order to burn up somebody inside, and then having a change of heart and making a few desperate attempts to get the person out.

Mead: It's no great change of heart.

Gross: That's what the court thought, too. But to go back to this rootlessness that you were talking about, Miss Mead: I wonder if this is the origin of Momism, because in a sense these two, Clyde and Roberta, both recover their consciences when their mothers show up again. When Roberta goes back to see her mother, she suddenly sees everything in a new light. And the same with Clyde when his mother turns up at the end. Don't you think so?

Mead: It's a kind of counterpoint to the aunt, who is such a snob and who won't let Clyde in. Women are the keepers of the class lines and of the narrow rigidities in this society. I think Dreiser makes that point all the way through.

Breit: In his scheme of things, in his universe, Dreiser did cling desperately to the idea that somebody, somewhere, is the keeper of values and of morality. It's a small thing—they're only minor characters—but he came up with the mothers.

Gross: Yes, but certainly the kind of values that these particular mothers kept would hardly have been sufficient to allow the two young people to grow and develop at all. They were imposed morali-

ties in every sense, weren't they? They weren't anything that Clyde and Roberta felt as their own.

Breit: The thing that worries me about this discussion so far is that we haven't talked about it as a novel at all. We've talked about it as a book of ideas, or a book that reflected ideas. But does one enjoy it as a novel?

Gross: Well, Miss Mead, did you enjoy reading it now?

Mead: I didn't enjoy it—it's too long. But once I started to read it, I couldn't very well put it down; it isn't a novel that you can skip. What is it—seven hundred pages?

Breit: *Seventeen* hundred, I'd say!

Mead: And you can't skip a single detail. So that as a novel it has force, it has strength. But it's a little too long.

Breit: Isn't this a kind of great trick of Dreiser's? He writes a long novel, very long, and yet makes the reader say: And what comes next? Now? What else? Although you know everything that's going to happen, and Dreiser tells you everything, you do read it as a thriller of a kind.

Gross: I suppose that's true. But I think the very fact that there aren't many individualized characters, that most of these people are types just barely sketched in—which I can't think is accidental, I think it must have been deliberate—makes us take it as a story of ideas. We come back, it seems to me, to that basic point of the title—its being called *An American Tragedy*. Perhaps this is a tragedy in the same sense as Greek tragedy, where the individual characters are submerged and swept along by Fate, and perhaps what Dreiser attempted was to take this age-old theme and put it in a very definite American setting.

EDWARD GIBBON

Autobiography

(As broadcast April 17, 1955)

THOMAS RITCHIE ADAM • MARY MOTHERSILL • MASON GROSS

Gross: Edward Gibbon is, of course, best known to all of us as the author of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, that monumental history. The first volume of it came out in 1776 and the final volumes in 1788. Thereupon Gibbon apparently started to write his autobiography, because he tells us that he put together these notes in his fifty-second year—which would have been 1788 or '89. Having described the whole history of Rome, he now undertook to describe the history of one man, himself, and seems to have

had more trouble with it. He never succeeded in completing the book, and what we now know as the *Autobiography* was pieced together by someone else. But Gibbon, if I understand him, was very much the typical Englishman of good, honest, but non-aristocratic stock.

Adam: He's thoroughly representative of the English ruling classes in the eighteenth century and the period of the Enlightenment, even though he didn't come out of the top drawer. It makes him all the more interesting: he's a second-class member of the ruling caste. He's got all the snobbery, all the sense of privilege, that stamped this peculiar and very interesting group of people. Through a process of ancestor-worship they maintained a continuity that is perhaps lacking in modern life, and Gibbon, like them, is very much the product of the family of Gibbon.

Gross: He certainly writes as though his theory of autobiography were first of all to tie himself to his ancestors, to fill up the vacuum of the past, and then to provide material for his literary descendants.

Mothersill: He's extremely candid, though, in his feeling about his ancestors. He says that we're all interested in knowing who our grandfathers and great-grandfathers were, and he has enough humor, I think, to relieve the snobbery of this kind of thing. You said, Mr. Adam, that he was representative of the English ruling class, but I should hope that the ruling class as a whole wasn't beset with as many illnesses and misfortunes in childhood as Gibbon was. He really had a wretched time.

Gross: I'm not quite sure whether Gibbon's illnesses were psychosomatic, as we'd call them today, or real. He always managed to overcome them. As for his humor, perhaps he just felt that the family, such as it was, was entitled to be completely eccentric. You recall the ancestor who changed the family escutcheon and put in an ogress to spite the kin of a female relative who had sued him in court.

Mothersill: That was the ancestor who visited America, and who was so struck by the little symbols the Indians painted on their birchbark canoes that he decided an interest in heraldry must be innate in the human race.

Gross: Maybe Gibbon's ancestor anticipated the modern anthropologists. What about Freud's *Totem and Taboo*?

Mothersill: Perhaps he was right after all!

Gross: But to go back to Gibbon himself: there was a pattern of illness in the family. He had five brothers and one sister, all of whom died in infancy—he was the sole survivor—and his mother died when he was quite young.

Mothersill: I think he was ten. One thing I like in the early part of the *Autobiography* is the way he discusses his own illness. When I read it, I thought of Proust's account of his equally delicate childhood. I'd like to read one passage here because it's so typical of his style. He talks about his mother's ill health, and then he says: "But the maternal office was supplied by my aunt, Mrs. Catherine Porten, at whose name I feel a tear of gratitude trickling down my cheek. Many wakeful nights did she sit by my bedside in trembling expectation that each hour would be my last." Now here is the sen-

tence I like: "Of the various and frequent disorders of my childhood, my own recollection is dark, nor do I wish to expatiate further on so disgusting a topic." I think that's a fine thing to say.

Gross: I think it's amusing to see that a pattern develops from this illness. Certainly *he* thinks there's a pattern: his illness prevented him from engaging in the normal pursuits. He went to school, but it didn't work; finally, his father, who seems to have been paternally unable to manage this young and perhaps sickly boy, sent him off to Oxford at the age of fourteen or fifteen.

Mothersill: Fifteen.

Gross: And again he's completely lost, completely separate. From that early illness you get a picture of a young man who is separated from his fellows; Gibbon always stood somewhat apart. He spent a good deal of his life in Switzerland, he wrote his first book in a foreign tongue, and he really wasn't in the swim with anybody, was he?

Adam: Are you suggesting that in order to build the great historian you've got to detach him from society? Is there a psychological link between the rather lonely, wretched childhood of Gibbon and his historical powers?

Mothersill: I don't know if there's a psychological link, but one thing is obvious: that to be an historian like this takes time. To write a monumental, overwhelming work like *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* must have taken eight or nine hours a day for twenty years. You can't do everything. I think the amazing thing is the amount of vitality and energy he *did* have. In later life he was certainly very sociable; he seems to have spent every evening at some kind of social function or other.

Adam: Do you recall the phrase he uses—that he "never had the luxury of abundant health"? He realized that his own sickness had helped him in his work.

Gross: I don't think Gibbon is at all unaware of the importance of his work; he doesn't have any undue modesty about *The Decline and Fall*. I would think that from his own point of view he considered himself, in spite of his ill health, a remarkably fortunate man. He says that again and again, doesn't he? And the account that he gives us in his *Autobiography* is really the history of this good fortune.

Adam: Yes, I agree with that heartily. From reading the *Autobiography* it is clear that *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is partly a reflection of the privileged place in society that Gibbon occupied in England, and that this concept of an aristocratic society is basically what Gibbon transmitted. He was a privileged person, and his chief lack, both as an individual and as an historian, is a feeling of what I'd call moral responsibility. He didn't really worry about the great mass of people. He backed Lord North in politics; he didn't care for the American colonists, he thought they ought to be suppressed.

Mothersill: But is that necessarily a sign of a lack of moral responsibility?

Adam: I don't know!

Gross: Perhaps we're jumping ahead here. After his experience at Oxford he goes off to Switzerland. The reason is that in the course of his studies he had become, to the horror of his father, a Roman Catholic. That, of course, makes it impossible for him to remain at Oxford where they all had to subscribe to the Articles of Religion.

Mothersill: In the eyes of his father, this conversion was tantamount to treason.

Gross: Yes, I agree with that. So he is sent to Lausanne more or less as form of punishment.

Mothersill: To be "deconverted," so to speak. He goes to stay with a Calvinist minister who has regular conversations with him every morning in which they go over doctrinal problems and, eventually, he renounces his Catholicism. It was during this period that he became really acquainted with French literature; all his life he wrote more easily, perhaps, in French than in English.

Gross: So much so that he was actually worried about the Gallicisms in his English style.

Adam: Do you think that in his "deconversion," perhaps, lay the root of what I feel was his indifference to religious principle? His very critical account of the origins of Christianity thoroughly shocked the public of the day. Do you think that that may have come about through having attempted to reach a personal religion, and then having been rather brutally pulled away from it?

Mothersill: I don't know—there are so many things that are hard to tell from the *Autobiography*. One doesn't really know what went on in this religious experience.

Gross: No, one doesn't.

Mothersill: I want to go back to the point that Mr. Adam made earlier about his lack of social responsibility. The main theme, I suppose, of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is that the civilized, matured values of Roman civilization were destroyed by the "barbarism" and "savagery" of early Christianity. Now, whether this claim is just or not, it surely is an argument that is put forward on the basis of a feeling of social responsibility. The great tragedy in the decline of the Roman empire was that it had been the monitor, the preserver, of the really important values in western civilization.

Adam: Miss Mothersill, you're taking an unfair advantage! I haven't read *The Decline and Fall* for fifteen years, but my memory, such as it is, is that the real theme is just the sheer joy of carrying forward the story—the sheer joy of telling about all those very unscrupulous and undesirable characters who were the principals in the dramatic episodes of the Roman empire.

Mothersill: Yes, he is a wonderful story-teller.

Gross: I think that your point, Mr. Adam, was undoubtedly well taken so far as Gibbon's own life is concerned. In his relationships with his contemporaries and the great issues of the day, he shows nothing that we could call a social conscience, or anything like that. It just doesn't seem to be there. He's horrified by the French Revolution because of the way in which it affected his per-

sonal friends. He seems to be very much a solitary, although in his early Lausanne period he does have, as far as we can gather, one love affair—with Suzanne Curchod, who later became Madame Necker.

Mothersill: This was the one great romance in Gibbon's life, and it became the subject of all kinds of controversy. Very briefly, as far as we can tell from the *Autobiography*, he met this girl who was extremely beautiful and not only clever and witty but quite learned, fell very deeply in love with her, wrote her a number of enthusiastic letters, and went home to see his father. His father disapproved, Gibbon says, of this strange alliance, and intimated that if his son were so unwise as to marry Suzanne, he would be cut off without a nickel; whereupon, after two hours of deliberation, Gibbon says—this is the famous sentence—"I sighed as a lover, as a son I obeyed." This is what shocked Rousseau so much. To Rousseau this was too cold, too rationalistic.

Gross: Then, of course, Suzanne went off and married the banker, Jacques Necker.

Mothersill: She was quite unhappy, if one can judge from her letters. But it became a great issue in their circle, and Rousseau had set it off. I don't know whether one can really decide about things like that. On the most obvious level, Rousseau was wrong. He didn't know Gibbon—what business was it of his? Besides, you see, there is the fact that Gibbon was quite incapable of earning a living. In the last analysis, though, Rousseau was probably right. I think when Gibbon said "I sighed as a lover" he meant "I sighed with relief": he was glad to get out of it.

Gross: Can you imagine him as a married man?

Mothersill: No, he was the real perennial bachelor. Afterwards, of course, he got to know Suzanne again as Madame Necker and established a very good sort of friendship with her. But that was the level on which he moved best—in this kind of temperate zone of the emotions.

Gross: This man, you gather, spent all his time reading books; you can't imagine him with a family bouncing around him. You see him, instead, reading his books, living on the fringes of society, going to a certain number of parties, and seeming to enjoy himself. Certainly in the *Autobiography* he tries to give us the impression of an average man doing what the average well-born Englishman would do. But he's much more than that: he's a real scholar, working all the time and reading vast amounts, without yet knowing what to do with it.

Mothersill: I suppose this is part of what Mr. Adam means by saying that he's a typical Englishman—this tendency, in spite of his vanity, to underplay the actual hours he spent grubbing through Tacitus and Livy.

Adam: Yes, but I'm at the moment much more concerned with Mr. Gross' declaration; for a man in his position, it's very serious. It seems to me he's suggesting that the scholar or the student is not in a position to marry. Now, what effect is this going to have on academic life, Mr. Gross?

Gross: I was merely pointing out that in Gibbon's day scholars

were unwise to marry. He was in a more competitive world there.

Adam: I think we're all forgetting the Captain Gibbon of the Hampshire militia, a patriotic gentleman who stood on the shores of England—for how many years was it?—and prevented the French from landing. He was a man of action. He was a member of Parliament, part of the North coterie that made up the North ministry. But was he a full, well-rounded man? Or were there secret psychological quirks that have affected whole generations through their insertion in *The Decline and Fall*?

Mothersill: In the first place, I don't know how one could answer that question. In the second place, I'm not sure if one found a positive answer where it would leave us. I mean, to what would it be relevant? You see, Gibbon's whole manner is of the eighteenth century. Those people didn't believe in depth analysis, they didn't believe in this kind of introspective searching of the soul. Gibbon writes with what he himself calls "golden mediocrity"; he takes the middle way; he tells about the important events in his life in the same way that he tells about the important events in the Roman empire. Now perhaps I miss the point . . .

Adam: No, you made the point well. But here, I think, we have a real parting of the ways. From my point of view, the historian is a responsible leader of society, just as much as a prime minister or a soldier. The historian carries on the continuity, he creates the pattern that people follow; an historian who is absolutely detached, who is just a scholar, just a raconteur, is, I think, quite a dangerous animal.

Mothersill: Couldn't one argue, though, that the historian is as much an artist as a ballet dancer or a novelist? We don't make any specially heavy demands on them.

Adam: Well, Miss Mothersill, I do on the historian. I do not admit that the historian can take refuge in merely providing entertainment or in pure esthetics; I think he has a social responsibility.

Gross: It seems to me that you have a kind of Platonic conception of the historian; I don't see why all of them have to fit the pattern. In the original sense of the word, I suppose, the historian was a man who told a story, and certainly that is what Gibbon thought of himself as doing. He was telling a story, telling it dramatically, telling it with a certain amount of rhetorical fervor, though very much concerned with avoiding the pitfalls of excessive rhetoric.

Mothersill: Which he doesn't always avoid. I think sometimes it really must be admitted that Gibbon is a bit of a bore. It's all on this extremely exalted level, and it's absolutely inflexible; whether he's describing the sack of Constantinople or telling about the way the Egyptians made cloth, the periods roll on and on. Even at best it's a kind of strain to read him.

Gross: That's true. But to return to Mr. Adam's point: perhaps Gibbon shouldn't have written his autobiography, because he's so frank about what he's doing.

Adam: That, I think, is the most attractive part of Gibbon's life as handed down to us now. The man was completely without cant; he had none of this hypocrisy of trying to cover things up, as

we're apt to do in public life today. He was a perfect example of his own period and he filled all the obligations of that period. But when we consider the obligations of a man today, I feel that the historian is now perhaps a different creature. You accuse me of being a Platonist and I say I'm following Homer; Homer was a man who told a story, but it was a story that practically created a culture. No great historian can escape the consequences of generating a myth that will affect the everyday patterns of life for generations. And that's the high standard that I call upon Edward Gibbon to meet. He doesn't meet it as the great Scots philosopher, Hume, did.

Gross: No, but he wrote a better history than Hume did.

Mothersill: The thing that makes the *Autobiography* worth reading, even for those who are never going to read *The Decline and Fall*, is this extremely candid, very disarming way he has. In spite of the vanity and conceit which are spread on every page, one can't help agreeing with Serena Holroyd, whose brother, the Earl of Sheffield, organized the various memoirs into the *Autobiography*. After Serena had read it for the first time, she said "It makes me feel affectionate to Mr. Gibbon." And I think one has the feeling that basically this is a very nice guy.

Adam: Miss Mothersill, it's one of the gratuities of providence that women are always apt to feel affectionate towards the most unworthy members of the male sex.

Gross: Oh, I can't agree with you! It seems to me that Gibbon does present an extremely attractive picture of himself. You wondered whether there are secret weaknesses that have crept into his history, but I think we have in Gibbon, as we have in Cicero, a man who tells us all his weaknesses. They're all right there in front of you, you can see every one; he's remarkably well adjusted to them. I can't really go along with your description of him as an active man, though. He may have been active in the militia, but I still can't fit it in completely.

Mothersill: He never got out of his armchair in his later years.

Gross: No, and he didn't want to be a member of the Parliament. He knew he wouldn't be any good. And the reason why he liked his job on the Board of Trade was that he didn't have to do any work at all.

Mothersill: And that, again, he says very frankly.

Gross: Yes. And when the Board of Trade was finally abolished, his only comment was "Well, there goes a nice income."

Adam: Isn't that true of some of us in modern life too? We don't all love our work for its sake alone; a good many of us just work because we're ambitious or a little greedy. I think Mr. Gibbon was average in that.

Mothersill: Yes, but not many people are willing to say so in a formal autobiography, without posturing, without making a big thing of it.

Gross: When he comes back to his love of reading and tells you about the books he read, about how he managed to exchange a twenty pound note for this wonderful twenty-volume work that he'd been looking for, about the excitement of London because there were

books there whereas in Lausanne there were none . . .

Mothersill: He had the real passion of a scholar.

Adam: I agree with you both on that; as a lover of books and as a student and as a scholar he's an intensely lovable man, and I think a very honest one. He came before the period of true historical criticism appeared; I'm very ignorant in this, but Niebuhr, I believe, was the first man to introduce critical history. But Gibbon was honest, he had great intellectual integrity, he never faked his sources or did anything of that sort.

Mothersill: It was a very English kind of genius—this mixture of storytelling and high style, with this humor that plays all the way through both the *Autobiography* and the history.

Gross: He had a sense of irony as well as a sense of humor.

Mothersill: European critics haven't liked Gibbon very much. The Germans don't like him because he doesn't write in a scientific manner, you know; he's too lighthearted about it. And the French, of course, disapproved of his theories about the Church, and never really appreciated this broad kind of peasant humor, which is what makes *The Decline and Fall* such a human book.

Adam: Miss Mothersill, Edward Gibbon would never forgive you that phrase, "peasant humor"! His family stretched right back to the thirteenth century and he never forgot it.

Mothersill: But he was always a bit of a provincial, wasn't he?

Gross: He doesn't try to trace the Gibbon family back into Rome itself; let's give him credit for that.

Adam: Well, that's just because he had intellectual integrity. I'm sure he'd have loved to do it.

Gross: Somebody once described *The Decline and Fall* as "the great Roman aqueduct that stretches from the ancient world into the modern world." I think that's what Gibbon was trying to make of it.

Adam: And that, I think, would be his great achievement. But is it a trustworthy aqueduct? I think it is, but I also think the defects in his character, as revealed in the *Autobiography*, show that there were a few cracks in the aqueduct.

Mothersill: Yes, but the fact is that most subsequent historians have spent their time mending the cracks; they haven't replaced the original structure. I don't think there's anything to compare with it.

Gross: To connect the two books, he wrote the *Autobiography* immediately after he had completed the history. He said he felt quite lost when the history was finally done, and he sat down to tell us what kind of person it was who wrote that monumental book. It seems to me, Mr. Adam—this takes the sting out of your criticism—that through the fear that somebody might misunderstand *The Decline and Fall*, he tells you with complete candor and frankness and humor exactly what kind of person he was. Isn't that commendable?

Adam: Oh, I agree with that. He was very commendable as an honest man. In fact, I can recall a phrase of his which is startlingly honest. It is that "the quality of a man's honesty depends on the obsequiousness of his dependents."

EMILY DICKINSON

Poems

(As broadcast April 24, 1955)

JOHN CIARDI

• THOMAS H. JOHNSON

• LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: Emily Dickinson is a strange and unique poet; she was almost unknown during her life, but has since come into great acclaim. Is there any way of explaining that in the nature of her work?

Ciardi: Perhaps in the nature of her work, or perhaps in the nature of her retirement from the world. I should say the most interesting fact about Emily Dickinson's poetic career and reputation is that, although she was born in 1830 and died in 1886, she is really a twentieth-century poet. She is part of the tradition of modern poetry, rather than of nineteenth-century American poetry. Only seven of her poems were published during her lifetime, although something over a thousand are now available. Her reputation flowered briefly in the Nineties, but quickly faded because of certain unconventionalities in her management of poetic form.

Bryson: I think one should hasten to say that this unconventionality was not moral, it was esthetic.

Ciardi: Purely technical. She seemed to be doing things that the academics of poetry regarded as deficiencies. Actually, she was finding her own norm.

Johnson: That is, I think, one of the very fascinating things in the problem of why her poetry was not published in her lifetime.

Bryson: Do you mean that she *wanted* it to be published?

Johnson: I think she did. In 1862—she was then thirty-one—she wrote her first letter to the critic Thomas Wentworth Higginson, enclosing three of her poems and asking his judgment of them. As we now know, those were among her finest verses, but they were unconventional in rhyme, in stanzaic arrangement, and in the very expressions that she used. Higginson, I think, was somewhat fascinated, but frightened in terms of publication; in the ensuing months, as their correspondence went on, he made it perfectly clear to her that she could not expect in her lifetime to see her poetry in print.

Bryson: Was he prophetic enough to think that perhaps taste might eventually catch up with Emily Dickinson and revive her reputation?

Johnson: I wish I could say I thought he was.

Bryson: We can't give him credit?

Johnson: I'm afraid not.

Ciardi: I don't think any poet can spend a lifetime writing poetry without having a sneaking wish to know how it seems to

someone else. It's such a subjective thing—you'd like an outside measurement. I do think, though, that if Emily Dickinson had been published and had won great fame during her lifetime, it would have been a rather meaningless thing to her. What she wanted from Higginson was a kind of reassurance that what she was doing *did* have validity.

Bryson: She was, even then, devoting her whole life to the writing of poetry? She never did anything else?

Ciardi: Precisely. And when once she had retired from the world into the house at Amherst, it became the world. Her inner conflicts, her observations, her self-imposed monastic existence—all these provided, in a way, her window onto the universe. It was a universe not at all devoid of life; quite the contrary—it was sparkling and bursting with life, sometimes coyly, sometimes in a way that simply takes the pulse and holds it. One of the poems I like especially well shows her reveling in the small sensations of life:

*I taste a liquor never brewed,
From tankards scooped in pearl;
Not all the vats upon the Rhine
Yield such an alcohol!*

*Inebriate of air am I,
And debauchee of dew,
Reeling, through endless summer days,
From inns of molten blue.*

*When landlords turn the drunken bee
Out of the foxglove's door,
When butterflies renounce their drams,
I shall but drink the more!*

*Till seraphs swing their snowy hats,
And saints to windows run,
To see the little tippler
Leaning against the sun!*

I think "when butterflies renounce their drams," for instance, may reasonably be taken as an example of a kind of unnecessary coyness.

Bryson: Yes, but that coyness doesn't spoil one of the most beautiful poems in the English language, does it?

Ciardi: No, I think that it adds a quality particularly her own—although I don't think it is her most admirable quality.

Bryson: No, I know it isn't, but it's part of her. In addition to the tremendous respect you have for the greatness and the lyric gift of this woman, you have a kind of affection which makes her faults more endearing than repellent, don't you?

Johnson: Yes; and I find, too, that the way she couples the universal with the minutiae of her Amherst daily life is one of the things that appeal to people increasingly.

Bryson: In a sense it wasn't even her daily life. For years she never left the house; she saw very few people; she had no life, really, except this intense life in the things immediately under her eye.

Johnson: That, and the fact that she lived with increasing intensity in her correspondence, which never stopped.

Bryson: Her unique art grew out of this peculiar combination of living as a recluse, except for her correspondence, and at the same time feeling everything that happened under her eyes with an intensity of almost sensual response?

Ciardi: That's precisely the point. Her art consists not only in perceiving objects sharply, but also in putting them against the longest possible distance. When Emily Dickinson looked through her back window, she was looking at Amherst—but eternity lay right behind it. This is the thing that makes it catching, gives it its quality and sense of life accomplished and held.

Bryson: But she never took off into that eternity; she was always right there in the garden.

Ciardi: Always, precisely that. The poem that begins "I heard a fly buzz when I died" is very expressive of that. Although it has been interpreted in various ways, I insist that it means that this was the last dear significance of life; this was the last thing life said. Even the buzzing of a fly was the dear noise of living.

Johnson: I would carry it further with another of her poems on death—she wrote many on the subject, and some of her finest deal with it—the one beginning "Because I could not stop for death." What she did in this poem was to create one of the most remarkable characters in American literature, the character of Death, an abstraction that she actually gives form to. He becomes in that poem a typical squire, who drives her away:

*Because I could not stop for Death,
He kindly stopped for me . . .*

Ciardi: And the next two lines of that first stanza—what are they?

*Johnson: . . . The carriage held but just ourselves
And Immortality.*

Ciardi: You see how she combines vast significance with the events of ordinary life: the carriage and immortality, death and the buzz of a fly . . .

Bryson: You say she made a character out of this abstraction; is that a common characteristic of her poetry?

Johnson: It's one of her abilities. I don't know of any other American poet, certainly, who has done it that way.

Johnson: Chaucer did it, Shelley did it . . .

Bryson: But most Americans haven't tried to do it.

Ciardi: Melville.

Bryson: Yes, if you want to call Melville a poet, which I'm quite willing to do. But that great white whale begins splashing around in the Amherst garden when you bring Melville and Emily Dickinson together, although they're both New England.

Ciardi: An example of the way that Emily—I always want to say Emily; I suppose one should say Emily Dickinson . . .

Bryson: Well, you can't say *Miss* Dickinson—it's completely impossible.

Ciardi: An example of the way Emily could combine what is simply coy, sometimes just too arch, with what is simply stupendous is the poem about the snake. Here is a local observation, the opening description of the snake:

A narrow fellow in the grass . . .

This is a bit of archness. The poem survives it, but it is something for the poem to survive, rather than what makes it survive.

*A narrow fellow in the grass
Occasionally rides;
You may have met him,—did you not?
His notice sudden is.*

*The grass divides as with a comb,
A spotted shaft is seen;
And then it closes at your feet
And opens further on.*

The way that rhythm carries it!

*He likes a boggy acre,
A floor too cool for corn.
Yet when a child, and barefoot,
I more than once, at morn,
Have passed, I thought, a whip-lash
Unbraiding in the sun,—
When, stooping to secure it,
It wrinkled, and was gone.*

That glorious choice of “wrinkled”!—“I wrinkled and was gone.” Then the last two stanzas:

*Several of nature’s people
I know, and they know me;
I feel for them a transport
Of cordiality;
But never met this fellow,
Attended or alone,
Without a tighter breathing,
And zero at the bone.*

I can think of no poet in the whole range who could go from “a narrow fellow in the grass” to “zero at the bone” in—what is it?—twenty-four lines.

Johnson: That final line, of course, strikes everybody who reads it. She seems to me to be the greatest in her shorter poems—the single quatrain or the poem of two quatrains. An example is the one about a country burial, which deals with the subject of death again, but in a broad way. It happens to bring in her favorite color, yellow; it happens to bring in a domestic situation; it is short, highly intense; it makes use of that word “awe,” which is one of her favorite words and which she always felt had to exist if you had poetry.

*Ample make this bed.
Make this bed with awe;
In it wait till judgment break
Excellent and fair.*

*Be its mattress straight,
Be its pillow round;
Let no sunrise' yellow noise
Interrupt this ground.*

There's a simple majesty to it. It's all within the village she comes from.

Bryson: You know, I'm troubled by this aspersion against Emily of coyness. I know it's there, all right. I know that it intrudes in the midst of things that are tremendous, that have an almost hammerlike effect on the mind, both because of their structure and their meaning. But I wonder if this isn't a kind of humor that she thought you might not exactly forgive, but would understand?

Ciardi: I'm sure that's true.

Bryson: You're not scolding her for it?

Ciardi: Not at all. I know of no lyricist in the language who is as certain—perhaps I'd want to modify that a bit, but not much—who is as certain of being read from now on as Emily. She has given us some of the memorable moments of English lyric poetry. But should it follow from that that everything she has done is flawless?

Bryson: Not in the least. I don't think that's quite what I mean. I can read page after page of the larger collections of her poems and be literally bored. I think there are a great many that just don't come off, but I don't dare look away for fear that I will miss something tremendous. But haven't you said that you think one of her chief characteristics was wit?

Ciardi: Absolutely.

Bryson: Perhaps you don't forgive sentimentality or coyness in a witty person?

Ciardi: That may be. On the other hand, when Keats starts off in a very serious tone and comes up with a line like "Thy lips, o slippery blisses," the whole thing breaks because it's unintentionally funny.

Bryson: That's not coy, that's just terrible.

Ciardi: The quality that makes Emily so successful is her ability to turn a kind of intimate, loving, maternal or sisterly eye on nature itself, and to join disparate things with a kind of inevitability. But in reaching out to put two dissimilar things together, it's certain that sometimes she's going to miss; not all such combinations are going to work successfully.

Johnson: It's my impression that when she achieved her greatest successes—that is, when she avoided the errors of sentimentality or of this pertness that we dislike—she did it because the poem came to her fully formed, instantaneously; if she tried later on to work it over, she seldom was successful.

Bryson: What about her habits of work? Are you sure, Mr.

Johnson, through your prolonged study of Emily, that she thought of herself as a professional poet?

Johnson: I'm sure that she did.

Bryson: That was her business in life.

Ciardi: Don't call it her *business*! It was her breathing; it was her way of seeing what she was.

Bryson: But what I mean is this: she didn't write poetry because she had nothing else to do. She didn't think "Oh, well, I'm shut up here in the house, I might as well scribble." That's not her attitude. Her attitude was "I'm going to use this time to make the greatest possible use of the gifts I've got." Isn't that right?

Ciardi: It was her way of being most alive.

Johnson: I think there was a period, in the early 1860s, when the problem of writing poetry almost frightened her. It was coming out of her with such overwhelming power.

Bryson: But it wasn't only those brief interludes in her life, those intervals in which she was shaken by unusual emotions—she wrote poetry all the time; writing poetry was her existence. Did she write better, however, in the periods when she was writing fairly passionate love poems?

Johnson: Apparently, at some point late in her twenties, she was deeply inspired by love. Whether the love was directed to a particular person is beside the point, but she felt it intensely, and she wrote intense love poems. Within a matter of a few years, say by 1863 or '64, they became more universalized; she worked out a kind of testament on the theme of immortality, which, in her mind, is very closely associated with love. This quatrain, for example, is a very good example of what I mean:

*Love is anterior to life,
Posterior to death,
Initial of creation, and
The exponent of breath.*

Ciardi: So much has been said about an unfulfilled love affair—that Emily fell in love with someone, and hid this love, and went into her monastic existence as a withdrawal from the world. . .

Bryson: That's the popular myth.

Ciardi: There is some substance to it, but I think two things must definitely be said about it: first, none of the arguments put forth in favor of one person or another as the object of this stifled love is wholly persuasive; and, second, it doesn't much matter to the poetry, because what she did was to make a symbol of love, to make an identification with the whole human process of love rather than with one person. No one really knows, the poet perhaps least of all, what goes on inside; some part of it is unreasoned, unconscious.

Bryson: Nor would he be a better poet if he did.

Ciardi: Precisely not.

Bryson: How do you explain this extraordinary combination that she was, which shows itself in a number of different parallels? There is her capacity, as you said, Mr. Ciardi, to bring the immediate, ordinary thing into the same compass with eternity and infinity.

There's also her capacity to be brief, witty, lyric in every sense of the word, and yet profoundly philosophical and thoughtful. Is there any way of explaining this extraordinary combination, when you consider that she was essentially an improviser?

Ciardi: I think most of the good artists are people who live with their deaths—or at least their total lives, which includes death—in view. A thing that happens to an artist is a thing that happens to a life. I think she had what every artist has to have: the ability to see things against the total. Her special power was in vivifying it.

Johnson: That seems certainly true to me, and in her case I think that everything was subordinated to her desire to *be* the artist. It's my impression that when she wrote to Higginson, she didn't write him to ask, "Am I yet really a finished poet?" She *knew* she was finished. Here's an example of one of the early poems she sent to him; it's very brief, and I think that it may well explain what she thinks is the function of the artist:

*We play at paste,
Till qualified for pearl,
Then drop the paste,
And deem ourself a fool.*

*The shapes, though, were similar,
And our new hands
Learned gem-tactics
Practising sands.*

Now, notice what she's done with those last two lines: she's reversed the beat. In the next to the last line, the beat is long, long, long, short—"Learned gem-tactics." It reverses itself in the last—"Practising sands." I think she was perfectly conscious of what she was doing.

Bryson: Perfectly conscious. And yet still working, I think—subject to your correction, Mr. Johnson—as an improviser.

Johnson: Yes, in fact, I agree.

Bryson: Poe boasted of fitting a poem together bit by bit and calculating its effect. But if Emily didn't get it the first time, she didn't get it at all.

Johnson: That's exactly right.

Ciardi: But when she did get it, what she achieved was more than just an image of the object. It was the object *in* the universe. One of the great poems, perhaps as great as anything she did, is this description of a hummingbird:

*A route of evanescence
With a revolving wheel;
A resonance of emerald,
A rush of cochineal;*

*And every blossom on the bush
Adjusts its tumbled head,—
The mail from Tunis, probably,
An easy morning's ride.*

All you've got to do is substitute—which would be dead wrong—"eternity" for "Tunis":

*The mail from eternity, probably,
An easy morning's ride.*

Because Tunis has become eternity without her saying it. This is not simply a hummingbird, miraculously jewelled and caught in these eight lines; it's all the hummingbirds in the world.

Johnson: It's my favorite, if I have such a thing as a favorite. It happens to have been one of her last poems. It's interesting that many of her later poems are pictures of creatures in motion, creatures that are iridescent.

Bryson: What did you mean by saying that she's had a great influence on modern poets, Mr. Ciardi? You read most of them, I guess?

Ciardi: Yes, I see the new books of poetry as they come out. I get all of them, or practically all of them, for review. Nothing is easier than to find a student writer, for example, who is influenced by Emily Dickinson.

Bryson: Do they know it?

Ciardi: I don't know whether they know it or not. I suspect they do. If they don't, any sensitive reader does. Partly because Emily Dickinson is a poet of wit—this joining together of disparate subjects is the identification mark of a poet of wit—and partly because her devices are so arresting; she has such control of meter, and imagery which is so identifiable and so powerful.

Johnson: I know of no poet who comes so immediately into the minds of students and who seems to them to be a great discovery they themselves have made.

Bryson: It's like a discovery you make of something which you've been told is beautiful, but when you see it you just stop and realize that nobody *could* have told you.

Johnson: That's why she had to be discovered in the twentieth century.

DANTE

La Vita Nuova

(As broadcast May 1, 1955)

ANNE FREMANTLE • JOSEPH A. MAZZEO • LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: The great problem with a book like *The New Life* is to bridge the gap between Dante's very real humanity and the humanity of today, considering that the forms of expression which he used have changed so much since the thirteenth century.

Fremantle: It's a love story, and today is May first—and those young people, Dante and Beatrice, met the first time in their adult lives on May first.

Bryson: And you think because it's a love story, and because we still have spring, that we ought to understand it?

Fremantle: I certainly do. I think that it's one of the most April-like, or May-like, stories ever written. It's as fresh today as ever.

Mazzeo: I think we might add, however, that it is a love story with certain peculiarities.

Bryson: It's a love story of a very strange kind: let's not be too gentle with Dante just because he was a great poet.

Mazzeo: I think we tend to feel today that love has only one direction, that it doesn't change its character; that is, however it begins, it stays pretty much that way for the rest of our lives. But Dante in this book described an *evolution* of love, and we find several stages in it.

Bryson: This May-Day meeting that you speak of was actually their second, wasn't it? But the story really begins with the first, when these two people, Beatrice and Dante, were children.

Fremantle: He was nine and she was eight, and she wore a little red dress.

Bryson: Bright red.

Fremantle: And it was of a rich stuff. He remembers everything, after all those years.

Bryson: In the whole book, with its prose and its interpolated poems, it's only once or twice that he mentions a physical thing, but he never fails to tell you how Beatrice was dressed. Is that because he's trying to impress you with the extraordinary beauty of this child?

Fremantle: I think so—and the extraordinary effect that beauty had on him. Because the whole first part of the poem is not so much about Beatrice as about her effect on him; it's only when she's dead that he starts describing *her*.

Mazzeo: You're quite right: the first theme of the book is the effect of love on the poet, or on the child who was going to grow up to be a poet.

Bryson: It begins with this extraordinary—I wouldn't say abnormal—experience of a nine-year-old boy who has almost a physical seizure when he sees this pretty child. I mean that his *obsession* is extraordinary; the physical throes of this boy are not so terribly unusual, particularly for a sensitive kid.

Mazzeo: Not at all.

Bryson: It's what comes out of it afterward that's unusual.

Mazzeo: Extremely so—that's the point. Lots of boys, at least lots of my students, claim similar experiences at even earlier ages.

Bryson: But they don't spend the rest of their lives writing the *Divine Comedy*, as Dante did.

Mazzeo: Exactly. Maybe they're just not lucky enough—I don't know.

Fremantle: And the girl isn't Beatrice.

Mazzeo: I think Dante would say that you may *think* you've

had this experience, but you really haven't; or maybe you didn't take the opportunity or meet the challenge that the experience offered.

Bryson: Even at nine he felt that, even though he wrote the book long after?

Mazzeo: Long after, and from the point of view of events reconsidered and interpreted in the light of a mature understanding.

Fremantle: Isn't it true that the sonnets are much earlier than the prose parts, that he wrote the sonnets more or less when he saw Beatrice a second time? She was about eighteen then, and he circulated them to his friends, saying "Look what I've written!" just as a child does.

Mazzeo: Yes, that's quite true. He uses a book metaphor at the beginning, "the book of my memory." Actually, there are several books: there's an anthology of poems, which is one book, and then there's his commentary on that, which makes another book. A lot of the passion, for instance, is in the prose and not in the poetry.

Bryson: But there is also a story in the prose, isn't there?

Mazzeo: Yes, but it's concentrated on Beatrice and what Beatrice meant to him. There's no scenery, for instance. Florence is never mentioned; it's just "the city." The other people are pretty shadowy. They barely appear; we hear about the death of her father, we hear about an encounter with the brother of Beatrice . . .

Fremantle: But they do go to church, and they have meals, and they have dreams, and they behave more or less like normal people.

Bryson: Well, Dante does; we don't know much about what happens to anybody else, do we?

Fremantle: Beatrice goes to church . . .

Bryson: Yes, because he sees her there. But we don't know anything about Beatrice's ideas or thoughts. In other words, Dante's point of view never shifts for a moment. This is about *him*.

Fremantle: But remember that when it happened to him he was a boy of eighteen, while the book is emotion recollected in tranquility. The prose is a wonderful aspic that surrounds the sonnets, but it's still emotion preserved in amber.

Mazzeo: I wonder if I might modify the Wordsworth to say that it's emotion recollected in tranquility *with* understanding. I think the important point is that what had presented itself at the age of nine almost as a physical experience . . .

Bryson: The boy was shocked by it.

Mazzeo: Exactly! It was unintelligible to him. You remember that he has nightmares, visions; he's terribly upset. But he comes in the course of his life—and that's what he's telling us in this book—to understand what the experience meant.

Fremantle: But don't you think that's a very valid experience for any small boy, when he suddenly sees a pretty girl for the first time? We know now that psychologically it's a very important moment. Dante says it is the beginning of a new life, and I think it is—that first experience of something other than one's self.

Mazzeo: But for most of us that experience doesn't lead to a beatific vision. I think Dante claimed that it did—for him.

Bryson: But one of the conditions for drawing a transcendent

experience out of a love affair is that you go on living a normal life otherwise. After all, Dante was a lover in every sense of the word.

Mazzeo: He experienced all kinds of love—kinds that he'd rather not mention, or just hints at, and kinds that he's proud of.

Bryson: And after he had put Beatrice in heaven, she rather scolded him for the way he behaved.

Mazzeo: I think we have to conceive of this relationship as a very special one among many possibilities of love. That is, he didn't have to do as we do today: combine romantic, carnal, and all the other kinds of love in one relationship. I think they could have remained distinct for him, and did. He seemed to feel no necessity to make them merge.

Fremantle: Could that come from the tidiness of the medieval scene, where things were very distinct? St. Thomas Aquinas' great word was *distinguo*. In the Middle Ages one distinguished the kinds of love; one distinguished what one felt for one's wife, for the girl who inspired one, for one's mistress.

Bryson: I don't think you can blame Aquinas; I think you've got to do something with Dante himself, if you can find it. What is it? Is it what we would call an excess of sensibility, besides very great gifts of eloquence and intellectual and poetic power? After all, he saw her only twice, really—at nine and at eighteen—but he spent the rest of his life building an enormous, endlessly impressive structure of thought and poetry about this girl. I mean, of course, the *Divine Comedy*.

Mazzeo: I would agree that we have here in Dante an unusual man. I think we mustn't forget that. This is the love story of a most unusual man.

Bryson: Unusual even beyond his extraordinary powers?

Mazzeo: One hesitates to use the word "abnormal," but he was tremendously sensitive to beauty. Beauty for him—and he spends many pages telling us about it—had enormous revelatory power. The beauty of her lips, the beauty of her eyes—he emphasizes it all the time. But it was not a beauty that he wanted to touch or possess.

Bryson: And yet it was a physical beauty.

Mazzeo: It was, but many times he uses the metaphor that this physical beauty is a radiation from within.

Fremantle: However much the withinness, isn't it true that it's always stated in physical terms? Even after she's dead, he has her talk about "my buried body" or "my buried flesh."

Mazzeo: What she seems to be saying is that the greater beauty she achieved by being translated into spirit—her spiritual beauty—should have led him on. Dante didn't follow that beauty beyond the grave.

Bryson: Perhaps we should list the stages through which this boy went. After all, he begins at nine with this physical reaction, this excess of sensibility. At eighteen it is confirmed—he starts writing poetry about her—and then he goes on and experiences different conceptions or ideas of love. Now, what are these stages?

Mazzeo: I think we might trace three stages, or displacements, and then we might add a little appendix—that is to say, there might

be a fourth. The first theme takes up ten poems, roughly a third of the book.

Bryson: How many poems are there altogether?

Mazzeo: Thirty-one. That's quite deliberate. Ten poems take up the first theme, the effects of love. Then, when she refuses to greet him, when she refuses her smile . . .

Bryson: She's a very human person. She just thought he was a bad boy, and she wasn't going to smile at him.

Mazzeo: He was causing vexation to various people. But his beatitude up to that point, his joy and happiness, had been in her smile. So he decides to displace that beatitude.

Bryson: Of course, we have to say that her smile had been caught at the drugstore corner, so to speak, when the girls walked by—that's all there was to it.

Mazzeo: We have no evidence that he ever got closer to her than that, really.

Fremantle: That's enough for an eighteen-year-old. I do come back to that.

Mazzeo: It's enough for a Dante at eighteen. I'm not sure that it's enough for every eighteen-year-old.

Bryson: It was enough to last him through his life until he saw her in Paradise.

Fremantle: Well, she died when she was 25.

Bryson: Yes, but the fact that she married a banker, which might, you would think, disturb a poet very deeply, didn't bother him a bit, did it?

Fremantle: No, it didn't; although, of course, he couldn't have done anything about it.

Bryson: No, but he could have stopped writing poetry.

Mazzeo: The second theme, when he displaces this beatitude, is putting it into words that praise his lady. It takes on a creative activity in lieu of the direct perception of Beatrice's smile.

Bryson: Let me get this straight: had he written any poems to or about Beatrice until she got a little bit annoyed with him and refused her smile?

Mazzeo: Up until that point he was actually doing it, but in disguise: he had a screen-lady. So that it is hard to answer the question whether he had been writing about Beatrice, because he had, in a way, although nobody was supposed to know about it.

Bryson: He hadn't confessed his love publicly.

Mazzeo: No, but now he is going to praise her publicly. And this second stage of love, where love is identified with poetic creativity, extends through the next ten poems—the next third of the book.

Bryson: I think you should stop there just a minute. I think we ought to have testimony from Mrs. Fremantle as to whether or not a lady's annoyance can be easily propitiated by the public praise of a poet.

Fremantle: Well, I think so—especially in those days at the beginning of the Renaissance, when poetry was beginning to be written in the vernacular. Here was this brand-new, fresh young

poet using a completely new idiom, very much admired by his fellow-poets; it was the most wonderful new style, and I think Beatrice must have felt this was a turn for the better, definitely, on the young man's part.

Mazzeo: There was no vanity on Beatrice's part?

Fremantle: I think not.

Bryson: Of course, I couldn't forgive Dante for loving Beatrice unless she were a little bit human.

Fremantle: She often seems so human! In the *Purgatorio*, when she's scolding him, she's a bit of a shrew, I think.

Bryson: Let's save that for a moment. Let's go back to these stages of sublimated love.

Mazzeo: The second phase of love, which is involved with his poetic activity, is suddenly interrupted by Beatrice's death.

Bryson: Which he had more or less anticipated all the time?

Mazzeo: Actually, we feel the presence of death, the shadow of death, from the very first page. We *know*. Those dreams, for instance, are very suggestive of death and impending disaster. She dies, he grieves, he describes his grief, and then we have an episode of deviation, where he meets a gentle lady who's compassionate, who weeps, and who smiles at him.

Bryson: In the beginning he thinks, doesn't he, that she weeps because she also has been disappointed in love? And then he decides that she's weeping because she's sorry for him.

Fremantle: She's sorry for him and she understands his grief over Beatrice. That's the first explanation he gives, but he frets a great deal about this . . . this serpent, as she was.

Mazzeo: She was a serpent. At least, he was beginning to suspect it; and finally, against this adversary of reason (she becomes an adversary of reason) the great vision rose up in him about the hour of noon. This is the vision of Beatrice in glory. But he specifies in that poem that he doesn't quite understand it, although he hears the voice of Beatrice and he sees a lady in glory. And in the final chapter, which I say is a kind of appendix, he really has the beatific vision of which he says, "I am going to study, and learn all I can, and write about her a kind of poem that has been written of no other." That's the *Divine Comedy*.

Fremantle: It is. There was never written about a woman a poem like that!

Bryson: No man ever before, Mrs. Fremantle, has had quite the courage to put his mistress at the center of heaven and write a poem leaving her there.

Fremantle: But this is the kind of person he thought Beatrice was.

Bryson: It's the effect she had on him.

Fremantle: And he does make it clear all the time that it was an *intellectual* vision: "She's the glorious lady of my mind." I think that's very important; the earlier ladies of poetry, the troubadours' ladies, were moral or immoral. They had a moral or immoral influence, but they didn't have an intellectual influence. This rediscovery of the possibility that woman can be an intellectual object stems, I

think, directly from Aquinas, whom you wouldn't let me cite earlier.

Bryson: Yes, I think you're quite right about Aquinas here. What about the fact that Dante found in Beatrice all kinds of symbolism—what we might call medieval symbolism, because it differs so much from our own?

Mazzeo: He does find a lot of symbolic value in Beatrice. For one thing, she's a three or a nine. That is, he keeps finding significances which can be reduced to certain numerical values, such as three or nine—obviously, as he points out, showing that she had a very peculiar connection with the Trinity, that there was something divine in her. That sort of thing strikes us all as sterile today.

Bryson: Because he still has one foot in the Middle Ages, hasn't he?

Mazzeo: Absolutely.

Bryson: He's still a scholastic at heart, isn't he? Although he's at the beginning of the Renaissance, he's also the end of scholasticism.

Mazzeo: Yes, I would put it that way. What makes him the beginning of the Renaissance, so to speak, is the enormous value he puts on literature and poetry and art. What keeps him in the Middle Ages is his scholastic mode of thought, especially as we see it in this book.

Fremantle: But isn't this book, the *Vita Nuova*, terribly important for us today not only because of its beauty, but because we seem to be rediscovering symbols ourselves? We fill our literature with them; we are discovering symbols as things, as realities. It may be that we're coming toward a new discovery of our own reality, which we've been doubting for the last hundred years.

Bryson: And not merely because of the influence that Dante now has, because, after all, he is in the ascendant as a figure in world literature.

Mazzeo: I think we've learned in the last fifty years or so how to read Dante better. He was eclipsed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There wasn't much interest in him then; he seemed rather remote. Oh, occasional odd figures learned from him or would read him, but that was all. Today, I think, we're readier to see things not merely as things, but as signs and symbols as well.

Fremantle: And wouldn't you say that Dante's symbols are particularly apt today? When Beatrice is given his heart to eat, the crucifixion, the earthquake—these are all symbols that are valid in terms of modern psychology.

Mazzeo: I think there's also something else that is valid for us in this relationship. We have such a confining sense of what a relationship between two people can be: we don't dare think of it as something leading to all this grandeur. Now, we may not all be privileged to experience something quite so remarkable, but the fact is that Dante did—and he opens up for us some of the possibilities of human relationships.

Fremantle: I also think it's terribly interesting to discover how modern his techniques are. His use of the flashback is absolutely modern. You have the girl dead at the beginning, dead in the middle, dead at the end, and yet she's alive the whole time; you're referred

constantly to small incidents which illuminate her life and yet are not obscured by the fact that you know she's dead and in glory.

Mazzeo: It recalls another modern technique, which is writing from a point of view. It reminds me, in that respect, of *What Maisie Knew* by Henry James. You see the events in the *Vita Nuova* from the point of view, first, of a boy of nine, then of a boy of eighteen, and then of a man. You get exactly as much maturity as he had at each period.

Bryson: And that's how he makes convincing the development of a childish obsession into this lifelong transcendence, isn't it?

Mazzeo: I would agree, yes.

Bryson: Since you are both teachers, I'd like to ask you this: when a young man today, sensitive and willing to be convinced about these things, reads the *Vita Nuova*, doesn't he object to Dante's complete reticence about himself?

Mazzeo: Of course. Most students are curious about things that Dante doesn't tell them. They'd like answers to such questions as did he go to school, where did he find Beatrice, did he run into her on the street, what did they talk about; they want to know about his everyday life.

Bryson: And why he didn't try to marry her?

Mazzeo: That's the favorite question, I think. They feel that he should have.

Bryson: Can you convince them that this was something that transcended all desire for possession, or even for closer acquaintance?

Mazzeo: Sometimes, if I can get them to conceive of love as a plurality of possible relationships.

Fremantle: When your students fall in love with a girl, do they at once want to marry her at seventeen or eighteen? Don't they just want to carry her books?

Bryson: At *eighteen*, Mrs. Fremantle?

Fremantle: Well, they want to date her, but they don't think of raising families.

Bryson: No, of course not, but they do think of spending the rest of their lives in her company, don't they? Anyway, I don't think we should try to force Dante into a normality that doesn't fit him. But what about this wonderful new style of his? We've lost that. We don't see the freshness of it now.

Fremantle: To me the most exciting thing about the *Vita Nuova* is the writing of it. I'm very glad that Dante had this transcendent experience, but what seems to me much more important is what he did with it.

Mazzeo: I don't think we quite realize what a revolutionary impact this book had on Dante's contemporaries. Here is a man who made the Italian vernacular do a lot of things that it hadn't done before. He gave it flexibility and purity of vocabulary. His style was new because he didn't take a lot of old, worn-out clichés and repeat them. Dante belongs in that way to no tradition.

Bryson: I don't suppose you ever can explain a book like this. I suspect that there are people born to love *La Vita Nuova* and people who aren't.

Fremantle: I think as a story of young love that it's absolutely unique. Isn't it the first story of young love in the vernacular?

Bryson: I suppose, in a sense, it it—because anything that reaches these heights is always the first of its kind, whether anybody ever tried to do it before or not.

JANE AUSTEN

Pride and Prejudice

(As broadcast May 8, 1955)

JAMES BALDWIN

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FRANK O'CONNOR

•

LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: There are a good many authors of distinction and even of greatness of whom one might say, "Well, I can take him or leave him." Nobody can ever say that about Jane Austen. You either think Jane Austen is one of the greatest and most—what shall I say?—enticing authors in the world, or you wonder what all the fuss is about. Now, what is the real "Janeite?"

O'Connor: I put myself forward very timidly as a typical Janeite. I think Jane Austen was the greatest of novelists.

Bryson: The absolutely greatest?

O'Connor: Absolutely greatest!

Bryson: Mr. O'Connor, don't I remember your saying once, on this very program, that Turgenev was the greatest?

O'Connor: I probably did.

Bryson: Well, the more "greatest novelists" the better. But how do you tell a Janeite?

O'Connor: I don't think I've ever met any other Janeite. I've read about them in Kipling, but so far I haven't really met any. I wonder if Mr. Baldwin ever met one?

Baldwin: You're the first, Mr. O'Connor.

Bryson: You thought they were imaginary creatures?

Baldwin: Yes, I thought Alexander Woollcott had invented them.

Bryson: I'm not quite sure that Jane Austen would be glad to have her whole discipleship invented by Mr. Woollcott, but it does begin to give people an idea of what it is to be a Janeite. What hold does this extraordinary spinster of the early nineteenth century have on you? Is it because, as a professional writer, you admire her ways and methods, Mr. O'Connor?

O'Connor: No single answer would be sufficient for that. First of all, she's one of the greatest technicians of English literature. She's as perfect in literature as Mozart is in music, and she gives me the

same sort of feeling. But apart from that, she is the first of the great novelists. One of the interesting things about the nineteenth century novel is that Jane Austen was producing her books exactly at the same time as Sir Walter Scott, who was the most popular writer who ever lived. Within twenty years it was quite obvious that the novel was going Jane Austen's way and not Scott's.

Baldwin: I've wondered where in the world she learned it all!

Bryson: Do you mean her material or her way with it?

Baldwin: Her way with it—the material was there. All she had to do was go to those tea parties and look at those people and listen to those conversations, as she obviously did, and to remember it all and note it down.

Bryson: She got the tone of it.

Baldwin: The way she lets you know what her attitude is, the way she reproduces and recreates this world, is one of the things that make her a very great novelist.

Bryson: I notice, Mr. O'Connor, that he said a "very great" novelist.

O'Connor: Ah, well, we'll educate him in due course. One of the very interesting things about Jane Austen—and it's been mentioned by dozens of writers—is that she never describes a conversation between men unless there is a woman present, because she did not know how men spoke when women weren't around.

Baldwin: That's very true.

O'Connor: You notice it in *Pride and Prejudice*. You may find Darcy in a most extraordinary situation, but you never see that situation described except through what he says to Elizabeth.

Baldwin: What's amazing is that within this tremendous limitation she still knows so much about these men, even if she doesn't know what they say when they're alone. She makes these people absolutely real. You don't feel any lack in her portraits of these men, in spite of the fact that she was always watching, as it were, from a distance.

Bryson: You have two things here: you have a world and you have an attitude toward it. How would you go about describing this world that was her material? Under those tea parties there was a good deal else.

Baldwin: She had an advantage which no novelist has today. She had a very ordered world to look at.

Bryson: As far as just looking at it is concerned.

Baldwin: Yes, but what she saw beneath it is what makes her so remarkable—all the disorder, all the pettiness, all the horror, all the heartbreak that was going on all the time. A woman like Mrs. Bennett, who was so earnestly marrying off her daughters by the most unscrupulous means, any means at all, is still a very respected figure in this world. Miss Austen doesn't really judge Mrs. Bennett. She deals with her cruelly, but she also arouses our sympathy for Mrs. Bennett because her dilemma is so absolutely human.

Bryson: What else would you do with your daughters in that period?

Baldwin: Well, marry them off—yes.

Bryson: That was the only career open to them.

O'Connor: There's another thing, too: Jane Austen had a particular sort of psychology which the modern novelist doesn't have. The eighteenth century was concerned with the conflict between instinct and judgment, and it was always taken for granted that it was necessary for judgment to repress the instincts.

Bryson: Now, the surface of those tea parties—that was judgment?

O'Connor: That's judgment.

Bryson: And the horror that Mr. Baldwin was talking about, that running horror under the surface—that's instinct?

O'Connor: Yes. The instinct, when it's released, produces all this damage. The very title of the book represents this eighteenth-century psychology, because pride is a fault of the judgment. Darcy is a typical Jane Austen figure. He is a father-figure. He represents judgment. You realize that she was terribly in love with him. It's really the masculine side of her own character which she projected.

Bryson: Are you talking about Jane or her character Elizabeth or are they the same person?

O'Connor: I think that's a difficult question to answer.

Bryson: They're the same person, really?

O'Connor: Elizabeth represents the side of Jane Austen which she was trying to repress, the instinct, and which was always breaking out in her. I mean that she must have been as witty and as charming and as muddle-headed as Elizabeth herself. She was always trying to direct herself.

Bryson: Toward this masculine ideal of balanced judgment?

O'Connor: Yes, this is true.

Baldwin: This whole business of the conflict between instinct and judgment is one thing that the novelist has lost today. Since Freud we know too much about the instincts and still don't know enough, with the result there is no order imposed on anything. It is very difficult for a novelist to describe his own world because the whole world is in such chaos; there is no longer any way of making judgments about it.

Bryson: Of course, that shows what we do to a teacher, because, actually, Freud would not accept that as his teaching, would he?

Baldwin: No, of course not. It's what has been done with him.

Bryson: Jane Austen had a world in which there was surface order, although underneath it lay the disorder caused by instincts, and you say that world is gone?

O'Connor: It *shouldn't* be gone.

Bryson: After all, decorum hasn't completely left the world, has it?

Baldwin: But it has ceased to be respected in the way it used to be, and this is why it's so difficult. There are still many people who have manners and all the old-fashioned virtues—which are real virtues—but these people are now regarded as eccentric. They were not eccentric for Jane Austen.

Bryson: That shows how young a man you are, Mr. Baldwin! I didn't know that the world had made the respectable virtues com-

pletely eccentric. I thought a few of us old-fashioned people could still have some sense of belonging to the community.

Baldwin: I overstated the case, but old-fashioned people is exactly what we are.

Bryson: You're putting yourself, young as you are, in my class?

Baldwin: Yes, indeed!

Bryson: But to go back to Jane Austen's world—what kind of story does she set in it? Can you tell it?

O'Connor: It's an awfully simple boy-meets-girl story, but "boy" in this case represents judgment, which has a few little faults of pride, and "girl" represents instinct, which has a great many faults of prejudice.

Bryson: And, of course, in the world of the eighteenth century, pride means an aristocrat, a conscious aristocrat with wealth and land and all the rest of it.

O'Connor: Yes. The boy and the girl are separated not by circumstances, but by what they are.

Bryson: What's the source of Elizabeth's prejudice against Darcy? After all, he was handsome, he represented the judgment that Miss Austen herself admired.

Baldwin: He was also very proud.

Bryson: Wasn't that part of the manners of his time and class?

Baldwin: I think one might say that that kind of pride is always an offense to instinct. You feel yourself being judged and you can't bear it. When Darcy meets Elizabeth he judges her at once and judges her very harshly, and she cannot stand it. This is the reason why she is so prejudiced against him right up to the moment of the proposal.

O'Connor: This is the only book in the world in which there is a proposal of marriage entirely devoted to the man's apologizing for his behavior and saying that he was badly brought up. Now, that's typical of Jane Austen.

Bryson: It sounds very dull as you just told it.

O'Connor: Well, it's really one of the most moving scenes in all literature. I remember that the first time I read it I broke into tears. It's the perfection of a daydream, but it is one of the noblest daydreams that ever existed. It is, in fact, the moment at which this great artist tries to combine her instincts and her judgment and succeeds in binding them into one central situation.

Baldwin: It is really heartbreaking. You feel a tremendous surge of relief, a physical sensation of relief, after Elizabeth reads his letter and looks at Darcy again; somehow Miss Austen has made you love Darcy, and has done it in some mysterious way by describing all of his faults—he's obviously an impossible man, but he holds your attention and he gets all of your sympathy. You are rooting for those two, you *want* them to get together.

Bryson: But how does she make Darcy sympathetic by describing his faults, even if he does blame them on his parentage and his upbringing?

Baldwin: She doesn't change his character, but she throws a new light on it suddenly; you see for the first time his virtues as

well as his pride. He is humbling himself, and you feel the effort. This is what gives that scene such tremendous impetus.

Bryson: There's no condescension in it?

Baldwin: Not any real condescension, although Elizabeth takes it as such.

Bryson: That's because of her prejudice.

Baldwin: And this is the moment her prejudice begins to dissolve.

Bryson: How much of your relief in this is because you, as a reader, have loved Darcy? You've loved this proud, rich, aristocratic, tactless person all the way through because Jane Austen has made you love him. You're relieved because the nobility in him comes out.

Baldwin: Yes. precisely.

Bryson: Well, now, that's the story, although there are all sorts of other things going on: Mrs. Bennett marrying off her daughters, getting into trouble, some of her daughters running off with the wrong man, poor Mr. Bennett being shoved around by his family of women, and so on. All that is just machinery, isn't it?

O'Connor: I suspect so, yes. It's just thrown in.

Baldwin: I'm not so sure that it's just machinery. I think, rather, that it's comment and illustration.

Bryson: It makes this world?

Baldwin: It gives this world body. You feel it, you have a sense of it, you know what's happening to other people. It suggests a great deal more than it says.

Bryson: And, then, of course, there's also the fact that she helps you to understand Darcy by giving you those scenes of aristocratic life with his relatives. They are almost farcical, but they apologize to you, in a sense, for Darcy.

O'Connor: There's also something one has to take into account, and that is Jane Austen's amazing technical dexterity. She never wrote two novels in the same manner.

Bryson: They're all Jane!

O'Connor: They're all very much Jane, but, for instance, in *Persuasion* she anticipates Virginia Woolf, in *Emma* she anticipates James Joyce. And one of the most astonishing things that I know of in fiction is the opening of *Pride and Prejudice*. In those half-dozen chapters at the beginning, you get for the first time, so far as I know, exposition and development united.

Bryson: For the first time in fiction?

O'Connor: For the first time in fiction! She uses exactly the same trick that the dramatist does in the theatre. "My dear Mr. Bennett," the wife begins, and you realize there is somebody called Mr. Bennett. You realize after a couple of pages that they've got daughters, you realize that a man called Bingley has a house nearby, and so on. That's the first and most extraordinary device. The second is that it dispenses entirely with a point of view, and since Henry James we've all expected one.

Bryson: You mean there *is* no point of view?

O'Connor: Absolutely no point of view.

Bryson: There's omniscience?

O'Connor: Omniscience. You think that it's being seen through Elizabeth's eyes; it's not.

Bryson: And yet you said a moment ago that she describes nothing but what Elizabeth herself could have seen.

O'Connor: I think you're misquoting, Mr. Bryson.

Bryson: Well, then, I want to straighten it out, but that's the way I remembered it.

O'Connor: Nothing but what a *woman* could have seen.

Bryson: I see!

O'Connor: Not this particular one, but *a woman*.

Bryson: She doesn't try to reproduce purely masculine conversations because she wouldn't quite know what men talked about; and, in fact, she probably thought she wouldn't belong there anyway. That's partly her tact.

O'Connor: It's not only tact, you know. It's almost a religious observance with Jane Austen. It all begins with her first novel, *Northanger Abbey*, when she says "It's quite possible Ann Radcliffe's novels can take place in the Pyrenees; I know nothing about the Pyrenees. They can take place even in the west of England and I know nothing about the west of England. All I am saying is that I know the middle of England and these things would have happened in the middle of England in this way." It's an art of witness, it's using the judgment as the absolute test.

Bryson: That makes all the more miraculous the way in which she conveys this extraordinary and so-difficult-to-describe attitude of hers. She doesn't do it with the events of the story. The events of the story have an emotional pull on you as few stories have, in spite of her lightness of touch. But she doesn't do it with the story. She doesn't do it by talking about herself. How *does* she do it? How does she give you this curious, cold, ironic—I would use the word malice, if it didn't seem a little too strong—how does she give you that feeling about herself? You say that she wrote many books in many different styles and yet every one of them was Jane Austen.

O'Connor: And every one of them described the conflict which is implicit in this one. I think the secret of *Pride and Prejudice* is that her real theme—she had only one theme, the conflict of instinct and judgment—is repressed. You don't notice it. You're not aware of it. You're terribly aware of it in a novel like *Mansfield Park*, where, in fact, she gives too much to her "father" figures and not enough to the figures who represent the instinct. In *Persuasion* she abandons it all. There she is, the lonely dying woman, going around from seaside place to seaside place, aware again of invalidism as a form of the imagination.

Bryson: But you still have evaded my question as to how she . . .

O'Connor: How she does it!

Bryson: I'm not talking about her extraordinary skill and style, the quickness of character, or this combination of exposition and development. I'm talking about the *Jane* feeling, which I get, although I wouldn't call myself a Janeite.

O'Connor: We've really been saying, haven't we, that the thing we admire about Jane Austen amongst all the novelists is that she is a supreme moralist. She is all the time teaching. She teaches very discreetly.

Bryson: You never catch her at it?

Baldwin: No, but it's her passion. I think one of the keys as to how she does it is that she cares so terribly about all these people. She cares too much about them to make an easy judgment about them. She's never really cruel. She loves them all and looks very hard at them; since she has this passion to make you see, to make you feel, she carries you with her in a subtle way that's hard to recognize.

Bryson: I'm still a little bit puzzled. Perhaps this is an insoluble problem. But you can look at people through the eyes of, well, Tolstoy or Shakespeare, and it's like looking through a pane of glass that has no color in it at all. It's absolutely clear. You look at people through Jane's eyes and there's a lovely ironic tint in the glass.

Baldwin: Yes, that's right.

Bryson: Is that her moralism?

O'Connor: No, that's a different thing. I would almost call it her femininity.

Bryson: But that's just another word. There are a lot of feminine writers in the world who haven't been able to do it.

Baldwin: Well, look at the way she's always poking sly fun at her men, particularly. She's really poking fun at the man's world, the things that men take for granted, and the kind of judgments that men make.

Bryson: Perhaps she's poking fun at men and loving them at the same time. I suppose it's a typical feminine attitude. I've never been present when only women were talking, so I wouldn't know.

O'Connor: Do you know, I think you have put your finger on something entirely different, Mr. Bryson, and put it very neatly. What you're really saying is that Jane is always *commenting*. You're always aware of her as a person in the story, and her subject and object are beautifully balanced. The other great novelists withdraw so far from their characters that, as you say, it's like seeing them through a pane of clear glass. Jane never entirely withdraws. She just nudges you very, very gently and says, "Listen to this. Watch the tone in which this is said."

Baldwin: That's exactly right.

Bryson: And yet there's never any sense of intrusion there, nor is there any condescension between her and her characters. Well, what about her people? Darcy isn't the kind of character you find in some novels, where a person represents a passion so much that he is a kind of embodiment of a psychological state rather than a person. Darcy is more than that.

Badwin: This is why Jane Austen is so important, I think. Darcy represents judgment, but she also know what he is like as a man—and this is what she really cares about. To come back again to that proposal scene; it is an affirmation of his masculinity, of his humanity, which is breaking through all the barriers of pride. What

is remarkable is that she should have seen this, and seen it so clearly, without any of the distortion that wrecks *Jane Eyre* and almost wrecks *Wuthering Heights*. Even Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* is much more an embodiment of passion than a man.

Bryson: You're taking feminine novelists by intention, are you?

Baldwin: Yes, I am; I think this is fairly just, because feminine novelists have a special handicap to work against. The truth is that they're living in a man's world; their point of view is limited. Every novelist's point of view is limited, but a man can go further and do more things and say more things—although it doesn't necessarily make him a better novelist. Miss Austen is the only female novelist I know and read who has this absolute clarity which, if I may be permitted to say so, is like a man's. She's always commenting, as Mr. O'Connor says, she's always judging, but you never feel that her own feminine personality has warped her point of view.

Bryson: She was Elizabeth and Darcy both?

Baldwin: She was!

Bryson: How can you be two people and still give the impression so exquisitely of being only one of them?

O'Connor: Aren't the great polarities in literature just two aspects of the same thing? Isn't Falstaff the other side of Henry IV? You can say the same thing about Shaw's *Candida*. Isn't Shaw at the same time the social revolutionary and the gentle poet, and isn't it true that these couples who occur so frequently in literature always represent the two sides of a man's personality or of a woman's personality?

Bryson: There are people who would say that that explains all great artists—they have in themselves two kinds of people, and where they are sharply in conflict the effort to be one person gives them this insight into the character of others. That seems a little bit like a formula, but you think it's basic, do you?

O'Connor: I think it certainly works with a great many works of art, though not all. You're not always aware that these two characters are really the same. Joyce does it deliberately in *Ulysses*, where Stephen and Bloom are obviously the same character.

Bryson: Of course, that makes Jane Austen the more remarkable, since she was these two things and yet she never lost the color of the feminine, never really lost her allegiance to the side of instinct.

Baldwin: Yes, this is the most amazing thing of all, I think.

Bryson: Why haven't other women succeeded in doing this? You ticked them off here very briefly and neatly, Mr. Baldwin, and said that the Brontës couldn't do it and other women novelists couldn't do it. Is it because there was not enough masculine judgment in the others—they let themselves go too far toward instinct?

Baldwin: I have the feeling that what makes Miss Austen a great novelist is the passion to teach. It is so strong in her, I think, that it burns out almost everything else. It burns out a certain pettiness, a certain self-seeking. She's much more interested, finally, in looking at the world than she is in getting anything out of it for herself.

O'Connor: Yes, I think I'm inclined to agree with Mr. Baldwin about that.

Bryson: But as a Janeite you've got to protest making her seem a teacher. After all, nobody could be less—what shall we say?—insistent or pedagogical.

O'Connor: It's rather like a lesson from a very great lady who never is vulgar. If you miss the point, she doesn't say "Oh, you stupid!" and she doesn't rap you over the knuckles or anything else. It's something that seeps gradually into your mind.

Bryson: And I suppose that if all teachers had as much wit as Jane Austen, we would learn more and have a lot more fun learning it.

NAPOLEON

Letters

(As broadcast May 15, 1955)

ANDRE MICHALOPOULOS • GOUVERNEUR PAULDING • LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: We read the letters of a man like Napoleon not as literature—although they may have some literary value in force and directness, having been dictated by a powerful and fast-moving mind—but to find out whether or not they reveal the real man. Do they?

Paulding: I don't think anybody can write letters without revealing a great deal of himself.

Bryson: Even when he's deceiving somebody?

Paulding: Particularly when he's deceiving somebody. But these letters do reveal a great deal about Napoleon—if you keep always in mind that they reveal a man who lived constantly in a dream, terribly removed from reality, in spite of the fact that every single one of them is didactic, precise, detailed, and concerned with action.

Michalopoulos: It struck me with this selection of letters that they seem to follow the pattern of a Greek tragedy. In that sense it is unconscious literature.

Bryson: The man's life was a Greek tragedy?

Michalopoulos: Yes. You find reflected in these letters his insatiable ambition, his sudden, extraordinary rise to power, and then the fulfilment of his dream. At the height of his career you find him believing in what he called his destiny—he was something entirely superior. He was a favorite of the gods. And with that comes the other element of Greek tragedy: overweening pride, the pride that precedes a fall. Then you get the wrath of the gods and the decline. And the decline is very evident in the last letters.

Bryson: Yes, even though they don't go at all beyond Waterloo. But let's get back to this dream: you say he was removed from reality. Could one of the greatest men of action who ever lived really be removed from reality? Perhaps you are suggesting that that made him a great man of action?

Paulding: I think it probably did. I think that action is sometimes removed from reality. What Mr. Michalopoulos was saying about Greek tragedy is very true, but I'm not at all sure that he got it out of these letters—because to me one of the main points in these letters is, again, their unreality. You can say anything in the world about them, but one thing you can't say: that they tell the truth about history. They do not. He's always in a dream.

Bryson: Well, he's always a liar.

Paulding: But the only way you can tell that he's a liar is by knowing what took place during his lifetime, and during the extremely short period that he was Emperor of the French. I think we should always remember how short that was.

Michalopoulos: Of course, you have got to use these letters in conjunction with a knowledge of history. You can't use them by themselves. If you don't know the history of the time, they don't make too much sense.

Bryson: I think you have to read *two* histories. You have to read a French history and then you have to read one by, say, an Englishman, or at least by somebody outside France who gives you the other picture.

Michalopoulos: Yes, that's very true. The French have always had a lingering admiration for Napoleon because of the glory he is supposed to have brought to them.

Bryson: He bled them to death, he destroyed their sons, he practically ruined them.

Paulding: But he left an amazing and extraordinary presence that they couldn't get rid of. Chateaubriand hated him, despised him, saw through him, watched him, judged him—and yet, when you read his *Memoirs*, this enormous figure looms up, haunting Chateaubriand; he can't get rid of him, he can't bring himself to say "We've had enough of him; forget him." They never could forget him.

Michalopoulos: Yes, because he was a realist as well as a dreamer. He was a man of order, of precision and of progress, and he left some things which have remained. He left the civil code; he left the Bank of France; he revised the whole financial system of France, which still works according to his dictates; he reorganized the university; he beautified Paris.

Bryson: With the help of his rather inferior nephew, Napoleon III, and M. Haussmann—but he started it.

Paulding: But what he also did was to rationalize and justify the giving up of the dream of the French Revolution. The French were tired, and they were glad that he gave them the Napoleonic code, that he built some boulevards, that he put up the Arc de Triomphe. But it was the collapse of a dream that had really meant something. If Napoleon's actions throughout Europe appealed so much to the people he conquered—and they did—it was because

they were under the misapprehension that he was still carrying out that universal dream of reform, the French Revolution. He betrayed it all.

Michalopoulos: You say the French were tired. Still, he didn't give them any rest.

Bryson: He gave them spiritual rest. Isn't that what Mr. Paulding means?

Paulding: That's just what I meant, yes.

Michalopoulos: I'm not sure that it is quite true. It may be true in the after-event. What remains of it may show that some spiritual rest was bequeathed to France, but at the time he didn't give them rest.

Paulding: Oh, excuse me, but at the time he did! He came upon France at a period that strikingly resembles our own, after the adventure of Vichy-France and the Resistance. He came upon a divided France, and he did impose upon it by his extraordinary adroitness a kind of calm. Could I read you just one thing from a letter to Archbishop Fesch of Lyons? It's a letter of counsel, extraordinarily cynical counsel it seems to me.

Bryson: A very young man to a very wise old one.

Paulding: Exactly. And his whole idea is that religion is an excellent thing to keep a country quiet—the old idea that religion is the policeman of the state. But Napoleon very rarely is explicit in that sort of thinking. He speaks as if his one idea were to restore the altars and reestablish religion in France, but he gives himself away toward the end of this letter to Archbishop Fesch. He says: "You know enough, and you have sufficient acquaintance with the doctrines and precepts of Christianity, to extract rules and maxims of conduct from religion itself, without talking about the good of the State." Now, if ever there was a double-faced invitation to dishonest thinking on the part of a ruler speaking to a religious leader, this is it. He was a complete megalomaniac on the subject of religion.

Michalopoulos: He insisted on having it under his control. That's why he made the Concordat with the Pope. And he gives all sorts of instructions about the way priests are to function, the way monasteries are to function; he won't have any Jesuits, any monastic militia. About nuns he says, "We must know who they are, and keep a careful watch on them, to be sure that they are not directed by priests out of communion with their bishop"—the bishop was controlled by the government—"Any society that breaks these rules deserves punishment without pity . . . There is nothing too bad to expect from ill-behaved spinsters."

Bryson: It seems to me that we're moving away from a point suggested earlier which was, perhaps, of deeper significance. This is a thesis Mr. Paulding raised: that although Napoleon demanded of the French tremendous physical sacrifice and activity, he gave them spiritual rest, because he stopped the questioning, he stopped the search for freedom; he gave them solidity and stability—and that's rest.

Michalopoulos: It is.

Bryson: It seems to me that's one of the tragic things about humanity—that we will accept physical sacrifice, even death, rather than think. Napoleon gave them a substitute for thought.

Paulding: And he gave them what he called glory.

Bryson: That's a dream of action.

Michalopoulos: I have to agree with that. In the letter to Joseph, written from Schönbrunn in 1805, he reprimands him for announcing that the enemy had made overtures of peace. He says, "The word 'peace' means nothing. It is a particular kind of peace that we want—peace with glory." Now, there you have the energy of the man. He cannot rest. He doesn't really want to secure peace, he just wants to go on with the dream.

Bryson: It's the very core of his cynicism that he let himself be acclaimed all over Europe as the emissary of the Revolution for peace and freedom and fraternity, although actually he was destroying freedom everywhere he went.

Michalopoulos: Well, peace, freedom, fraternity—those he didn't believe in for a moment.

Bryson: Not at all. But he pretended to, and he let the people think he did.

Michalopoulos: When the Swiss were complaining about the Constitution of Malmaison, which he had imposed on them, he writes to Talleyrand: "What he [Colonel Mullinen, a Swiss] says about the will of the people is all nonsense—you don't express the will of the people by bribing a handful of armed men to raise a riot." Now, it hadn't been a handful of armed men; it was the Swiss nation that was rising. The Swiss are very freedom-loving people. And then he goes on: "Besides, my calculations are not based upon what the Swiss people would like, but upon what is to the advantage of forty million Frenchmen . . ."

Paulding: It wasn't just the Swiss. He wrote exactly the same kind of letter about the Italians, about any foreign people at all. They had to serve the French.

Bryson: Meaning Napoleon.

Paulding: Meaning himself. He says that explicitly in another letter: "The French in Paris know better than to complain. They keep their mouths shut, because I am not governing with the idea that the people are the sovereign. I am the sovereign!"

Michalopoulos: I'd like to take that point up, because it's very interesting. Right towards the end, on March 14, 1814, when he's really in his decline, he says: "I will be master everywhere in France, as long as I have a breath in my body. You like flattering people, and fall in with their ideas"—this is to Joseph—"I like people to please me and to fall in with mine. I am master today, every bit as much as at Austerlitz . . . There is a difference between the times of Lafayette, when the people were sovereign, and the present moment, when I am . . . If the people once see us doing what they like, instead of what is good for them, they will obviously imagine that they are the sovereign, and will have a very poor opinion of those who govern them."

Bryson: Going back to this idea of his living in a dream: is it

merely that he thought he was a conqueror still, when he'd lost his grip? Or do you mean something more than that?

Paulding: Oh. I mean much more than that. I think it's in his whole conduct toward his army.

Bryson: In the days of his glory

Paulding: Even then. I think the one exception you have to make is that first miraculous, extraordinary Italian campaign, when he was a young commander, always in the front lines with his troops, always improvising. I think that he was in a dream even then, but in a dream of supreme action and close to his men. I think the tragedy is that this man who lived with the army, who believed in nothing but his great army, became steadily more remote from that army. After all, in the retreat from Russia he left it completely and hastened back to Paris.

Bryson: He never would have done that in his twenties, would he?

Paulding: Never. He would have died first, as he said again and again. He would have died at the head of his troops if he had had to. But toward the end he was capable of writing, in a letter to Josephine after the battle of Wagram—it's an unfair quotation, if you want, but any quotation is unfair—"My losses are high, but the victory is decisive and complete. We have taken more than 100 guns, 12 flags, and a number of prisoners. I am sun-burnt." Now that is really staggering, I think.

Bryson: But it seems to me one of the few rather endearing things about Napoleon—that in writing to his wife, after describing a tremendous event in history, he remembers to put in a homely detail.

Paulding: That's very charitable on your part. I think that's the nicest thing that has been said about Napoleon today.

Bryson: I think there are things about Napoleon that you can like as well as admire, but I admit you have to sort of search for them in these cynical letters.

Michalopoulos: I wonder if we're not idealizing him a bit too much?

Bryson: He's too much for us, Mr. Michalopoulos!

Michalopoulos: No, no, in talking about this dream. I mean that there is supreme egotism there, and the dream is possibly more in the nature of a nightmare. I don't know.

Bryson: It didn't start out as a nightmare.

Michalopoulos: No, it didn't start out as such. At first he was full of republican virtues, full of patriotic Corsican virtues. Corsica wanted her independence from France. That's how he started out. When he got to France and found there more terrain for his personal operations and the satisfaction of his personal ambition, he became a French officer and did well; as a result of the Revolution, he was thrown into a lot of activity where he got a grip of things. Then he developed republican virtues.

Paulding: I don't think it was exactly as a result of the French Revolution. It was a result of the *collapse* of the French Revolution.

Michalopoulos: Yes, of the upheaval.

Paulding: Not only of the upheaval, but of the entry into the Paris government of corrupt temporizers who were trying to hide.

Bryson: That's the second phase of a revolution, and he took advantage of it. Always—even with a man of abilities as great as Napoleon's, and with this unreality that he lived in and by—you must have an occasion.

Michalopoulos: Unreality, but great realism. You see, in the detail he's absolutely realistic. He does exactly the right thing to seize power and he knows how to play his cards. He goes off to Egypt on this expedition—why? Not exclusively to conquer Egypt. Of course, he was eager to get glory for himself if he could. But he went in order to allow the Directorate to collapse, because he saw that they were corrupt and were losing power. He was part of them, so he had to get away from them. His thought was: "Give them two years and they'll fall to pieces." When they did fall to pieces, he abandoned his army, rushed back to France, established the Consulate, and got himself in the driver's seat.

Bryson: Do you think he foresaw all that?

Michalopoulos: I think so.

Bryson: You think he really planned it?

Michalopoulos: I do.

Bryson: I don't mean that he planned the collapse, but he could see it coming?

Michalopoulos: I think, definitely.

Bryson: And he thought at the right time he could step back and become First Consul and then Emperor?

Michalopoulos: Oh, I don't know that he actually foresaw the Empire, but he knew that he would seize power when the Directorate collapsed. We find this, not in this book but in Las Cases' *Memoirs*.

Bryson: But do you call that realism—or paranoia?

Michalopoulos: Why, I call it complete cynicism. He sees that the Directors haven't the ability to maintain themselves in power; he lets the rotten fruit fall from the tree and then runs back to prune it.

Paulding: And that was when he committed his first and perhaps greatest crime, apart from any ideological crime of betrayal of the Revolution—the murder of the Duc d'Enghien. Even as early as that his over-vaulting ambition led him to do things that are absolutely indefensible.

Bryson: I think that is part of the measure of the man. When you read these letters, you see him fawning on little people because he wants their loyalty; you see his cynicism about his relations with women, including Josephine, whom he seems for a brief time to have loved; you see his cynicism toward the great when he's trying to propitiate or ingratiate himself with them. But there comes a time when they are no longer mean little cynicisms but great crimes.

Michalopoulos: Yes, they increase. I mean, as his career proceeds and as his successes are fulfilled, it's again Greek tragedy. He fulfills his destiny and then succumbs to overweening pride; like Oedipus, he is ripe for a fall.

Paulding: Living in our times, it's almost impossible to judge Napoleon's cruelty because it was so infinitely less than the cruelty with which we now have to live.

Michalopoulos: Our cruelty is impersonal, his was personal.

Bryson: He didn't have the mechanical power to be as cruel as we are.

Paulding: But there, again, he's very human; he sometimes operates on a very small scale. May I quote one example of what I consider sadistic cruelty? I do so not to accumulate crimes on Napoleon's head, but to show that even in a period when he was wasting the substance of the whole country, his personal cruelty was so much less than the contemporary.

Michalopoulos: I agree with that.

Paulding: He's caught two spies, and he says: "Have Cifenti executed—he is a wretched spy. In Sassi's case, I agree to a commutation of his sentence. But you are to have him taken to the place of execution, and you must not produce the reprieve until Cifenti has been executed, and it is Sassi's turn to mount the scaffold. I want him to see with his own eyes how a crime like his is punished." Now that is almost as trivial as Baron Scarpia pulling a dirty trick in Tosca.

Michalopoulos: But he considers it disciplinary.

Paulding: Well, he may; it's intensely disagreeable all the same.

Bryson: Do you think he enjoyed it?

Paulding: No, I don't; I think he was very impersonal about that.

Michalopoulos: I think he was an egotist and a cynic, but I don't think that he was absolutely inhuman. And I think he did know how to play upon human emotions, sometimes in a sympathetic way. I remember a story that isn't in this book, but that I have read in some history of Napoleon. It refers to a certain Private Taillefer who had performed an act of bravery on the field of battle. After the battle Napoleon mustered his troops, ordered the drummers to roll their drums—"Roulez tambours!"—ordered Taillefer to step forward, promoted him to the rank of corporal, and told him to step back into the ranks. Immediately he repeated the order to the drummers—"Roulez tambours!"—brought Taillefer forward again, and made him a sergeant. Then he continued the process, up through the ranks of sergeant major, lieutenant, and captain, and finally pinned the medal of the Legion of Honor on Taillefer's breast. All this on the battlefield in front of the troops. Such acts were, of course, acts of showmanship, but they involved a great deal of human warmth and they are what won him the extraordinary devotion of his troops.

Bryson: Propaganda of the most expert and subtle sort.

Paulding: They furnished the themes for those lithographs that circulated round Europe for years and years and years afterward, the Charlet drawings and all that.

Bryson: They even made Browning write a romantic poem. But it was all part of his self-deception?

Michalopoulos: Well, haven't we all self-deception?

Bryson: Of course we have. I even find myself—and this has

disturbed me a lot—wondering whether or not I don't forgive him some of his egotism because of his power. I hope I don't, but I'm afraid I do.

Paulding: After all, he was a dictator, whatever you say about him.

Bryson: He became one.

Paulding: He utters the usual dictator's lament, to which we've been accustomed for years and years now: "People complain that we have no literature: it is the fault of the Home Secretary." And like other dictators, he feels that he is surrounded by hopeless idiots. He writes to his Minister of Marine and says, "It seems that if I want a single schooner to sail I shall have to design it myself!" That, I think is somewhat endearing.

Bryson: We see the great trouble, and we like that.

Michalopoulos: But he initiated so many things, he was an initiator all the time; sometimes he meddled in things he knew nothing about, such as education. I refer to his long note outlining his notions of what a boy's education should be. It has nothing to do with preparing boys for life—it just prepares them for specialized careers in a very sketchy way.

Bryson: For the battles of Napoleon.

Michalopoulos: Exactly. But what I like is his sketch for a girl's education. He writes: "What we ask of education is not that girls should think, but that they should believe. The weakness of women's brains, the instability of their ideas, the place they will fill in society, their need for perpetual resignation, and for an easy and generous type of charity—all this can only be met by religion, and by religion of a gentle and charitable kind."

Bryson: Are you displaying Napoleon's cynicism or your own?

Michalopoulos: There's no cynicism there. I think that if women were educated in that way, the world would be a much happier place.

Bryson: Look out—you may get Napoleon's punishment if you commit his crimes!

Paulding: There are many charming examples of his interference in every detail. He wants to have a fountain built on the site of the Bastille, and—but listen to this: "I assume that the elephant will stand in the center of a huge basin filled with water; that it will be a handsome beast, and big enough for people to be able to get inside the howdah on its back." After all, when he went to Egypt he took the greatest scientists and Egyptologists with him; you can laugh at that, but it did result in the Empire style.

Michalopoulos: Oh, I don't laugh at that at all. I think that, together with the fulfillment of his particular purposes, he sometimes had an urge to do what he thought was good and beautiful, and that this scientific and archeological expedition to Egypt was the sign of a man who wanted progress.

Bryson: Suppose he came along today: with all his ability and all his cynicism and all his drive *and* the occasion, would we fall for it?

Michalopoulos: I can't answer that question.

Bryson: Here in America—what do you think?

Michalopoulos: No we wouldn't. Times have changed too much. I don't think you can compare one period with another, except in essential values. And I don't know that an essential issue is raised by your question.

Bryson: I'm not sure that it is. But I'm always suspicious of being too complacent toward these foolish Frenchmen who went out and spilled their blood for Napoleon's dream; perhaps, on occasion, we might do the same thing. I think we should at least ask the question.

Paulding: We have spilled our blood on various occasions, and not just in this last war. I'd like very much to make a final comment, and not my own, on Napoleon. I want to quote a letter which he couldn't have written himself. The letter is just two sentences: "In this sad world of ours, sorrow comes to all, and to the young it comes with the bitterest agony because it takes them unawares. The older have learned to ever expect it." Now, Napoleon could never have written that letter.

Michalopoulos: That's true.

Bryson: Who did write it?

Paulding: Abraham Lincoln. And there, I think, is the final comment. As Napoleon was superior to all the dictators we've known, in the same measure he's the inferior to that kind of mind, writing that kind of letter in the midst of a war.

Michalopoulos: Mr. Bryson, in answer to your question: you said that in this country blood is shed for a cause—but it's not shed for glory alone.

Bryson: And I suspect it's not shed just for one man, even though he may represent glory. They say more books have been written about Napoleon than about any other person who ever lived, except, possibly, Abraham Lincoln. The contrast between them remains the real comment on the two men, doesn't it?

BENJAMIN CONSTANT

Adolphe

(As broadcast May 22, 1955)

BERNARD FRIZELL

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PIERRE SZAMEK

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LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: Here is a book which is 150 years old and is always referred to by the critics in its own country as a great book, although you suspect they call it that without reading it. You're surprised when you go back to it and find that it has a vitality which novels

of—what was it?—1806 don't generally have. This book still says something.

Frizell: Yes, I believe it does. I have just reread *Adolphe*, after not having been in contact with it for a long time. It strikes me that the book is more an analytical narrative than a novel in the contemporary sense. It's interesting because it was just about the first thing of its kind, although it had a very distinguished sequel in the works of many French writers of the nineteenth century. But more interesting than that is the character of its hero and heroine, Adolphe and Ellénore.

Bryson: Almost the total cast of characters.

Szamek: I'm glad that you said it's an analytical narrative and not a novel. I certainly don't think that it is a novel, but I do think that it's more than an analytical narrative. I think it's a letter, a confessional letter, written by a man who was searching for candle-light in paradise and found only a 25-watt bulb in the antechamber.

Bryson: He didn't find a 25-watt bulb, he found a blazing chandelier! Mr. Frizell says it was the first analytical novel, but in 1806 one didn't publish novels when one was a gentleman and a man of good family.

Frizell: Well, Constant didn't publish this one. What he did was to write it in a mere two weeks—and it's the book that he's remembered by, although he spent forty years writing some of his other works—and he read it in public. He read it aloud in the fashionable salons of the time.

Bryson: In a quasi-public way; that is, he didn't charge at the gate, did he?

Frizell: No, but the salons were filled when word got around Paris that M. Constant had written a marvelous little book, and that it was all about himself and his *amour* . . .

Bryson: And they knew who that *amour* was.

Frizell: Yes, it was Mme. de Staël, who was perhaps the most famous and most remarkable woman of her time. She was the great intellectual who dominated, to a large extent, the men of her period.

Szamek: And that is the theme of this book: what would happen if an agitated and tumultuous woman, as Mme. de Staël was . . .

Bryson: With a wonderful brain, remember.

Szamek: With a wonderful brain—what would happen if she should encounter a brilliant and charming man? Well, of course, what happens is that sparks begin to fly and sulphur fumes to rise.

Frizell: And the man, as men will in such cases, becomes her slave.

Bryson: Are you saying that when the palpitating females gathered in the salons to listen to the great M. Constant read his novel, they took it as an actual account of his relations with Mme. de Staël? Because if they did, they were wrong.

Frizell: They were wrong in one way and right in another. What Constant did was to tell the true story of his relationship with Mme. de Staël, but knowing her fury if she realized that he was making this public, he naturally disguised what she was like.

Bryson: He disguised it by making Ellénore, unlike Mme. de

Staël, neither a great lady nor a great savant, but rather the mistress of a nobleman whose position was exceedingly doubtful in society.

Frizell: Constant took as his model not one woman whom he had loved, but two. The first was Anna Lindsay, an Englishwoman. But the essential part of the character of Ellénore is Mme de Staël. It's from Constant's relationship with her, when he had become her slave, that the great interest of the book derives.

Szamek: Aside from whatever slavery there is, we have a fairly simple and straightforward story. We have the story of a young man of twenty-three who has just completed his studies at the University of Göttingen, and is about to make the grand tour of Europe, as was the custom at that time.

Bryson: If you could afford it.

Szamek: Yes. But he belonged to a social class, the lower fringes of the aristocracy, where it was the accepted thing to do. And in his grand tour, while sojourning in Brunswick, he meets this delightful woman and does, as you say, become her slave.

Bryson: She was a good deal older than he.

Szamek: Ten years older, yes. And of course that's typically French, isn't it? A woman doesn't really become worth anything till she's nearly forty.

Bryson: I don't think that's such a bad idea—the French idea that a woman isn't worth anything until she's developed her mind.

Frizell: That was the one thing that Constant demanded of a woman. Mme. de Staël was no great beauty, but she had an enchanting figure, the books tell us, and she had a great mind. She was much older than Constant, of course, in that respect.

Bryson: But I'm troubled by this idea that he really was telling the truth about his affair with Mme. de Staël, and that that is the reason why people read it—because it seems to me that in this book he is, in a sense, revenging himself on the great lady.

Frizell: To some degree he is.

Bryson: Making her suffer.

Frizell: He's also making himself suffer. When he tells the story of their relationship and of his enslavement to her, there are two things that he really emphasizes: one is the fact that she dominated him; the other is the fact that he couldn't resist her, no matter how much he tried. He caused her to suffer by staying with her; he would have hurt her less if he had had the strength to leave her.

Bryson: But that would have brought the suffering on himself.

Frizell: He wanted to write the book to show what happens to a man with an arid heart and a sharp intelligence, but too much sensibility.

Szamek: The trouble is that he was, of course, essentially a weak man.

Bryson: Extremely weak, and, as he says himself, he had this arid heart. Long after—nearly twenty years after he wrote the book and ten years after it was first printed—he claimed to have written it for a moral reason. He wrote it, he said, because he wanted to show what happens to a man with a dry nature.

Szamek: After twenty years of reflection it's easy to rationalize.

He didn't think that when he wrote the book. He didn't think it in the midst of this affair with Mme. de Staël, although even then he was a man who tried to rationalize everything. No one can make a clinical case history out of a love affair as effectively as a civilized Frenchman, and here you have the completely civilized Frenchman.

Bryson: Do you mean that this conflict between what Mr. Frizell has just called his intelligence and his sensibility is something that the French see in themselves more clearly than other nations?

Szamek: I think so. I think it's what Napoleon called "the Roman head on the French heart." I think that's exactly what it is. He tried to intrude a mathematical equation into a love affair, and a mathematical equation in love is as out of place as a Bendix in Babylon.

Frizell: Of course, these were two very remarkable people. They were remarkable from the beginning. At the age of five, Constant knew Greek grammar; at the age of ten he was writing letters so mature that the French critic Sainte-Beuve claimed they were forgeries. And, Mme. de Staël, on her side, was a member of a very famous family, the Neckers. They had a magnificent salon. At the age of ten she was sitting in this salon listening to the great minds of Europe. She developed into a woman of such force and power that when she had her own salon, it was regarded by all the intellectuals of Europe as precisely the place to go; no man could resist her. And when she took a liking to Constant, he could resist no more than anybody else. The fact of the matter is that he was so terribly weak and vacillating that, although constantly he was trying to get out of her clutches, to escape, she simply wouldn't let him do it. It seems to me that this book, like much of the rest of his life, is merely a demonstration of how variable a Constant can be.

Bryson: But I still think that he was in a sense revenging himself on her, because after all he never really got away; he never really shook off this woman's fascination. He tried to get her to marry him. She wouldn't.

Szamek: Do you know why? I think he never really forgave her for being more intelligent than he was.

Bryson: That's quite right.

Szamek: And she understood that. She wrote a wonderful letter—as a matter of fact, the history of this love affair seems to consist of arguments, reconciliations, and retirements into morose brooding from which they bombarded each other with letters . . .

Bryson: Plus experimental marriages, of which she had several.

Szamek: Yes, there were a number of those. But in this initial stage of her affair with Constant she wrote him a wonderful letter. It's this: "To Constant: You are the most profoundly bitter and indelicate man on earth today. You tell me that for six thousand years women have complained of men for not loving them . . . You tell me that my sadness made more impression upon you once. Will you tell me if it prevented you from marrying, in spite of a promise of marriage made to me? There is not one spot of my heart that has not been ravaged by your persistent hatred . . ." And then they made up again.

Frizell: Nevertheless, she never did agree to marry Constant. She had an eminently practical reason: the name of Mme. de Staël was known throughout all of Europe, so why in the world should she change it?

Bryson: Yes, that's perfectly true. He had nothing to offer her except his love, and she had that anyhow. But he shows his desire to get away from her by going off and marrying someone else, then giving up that marriage, having other affairs, giving them up and coming back. It's quite different from what happens in the book, if you'll let me persist in that point a bit. It seems to me that in the book Adolphe—Benjamin Constant himself, of course—comes out with a little more dignity than he does in real life.

Frizell: Well, it would be difficult for him to come out with less.

Bryson: That's right. He didn't have any dignity in real life.

Frizell: But then, on the other hand, he doesn't have a terribly great amount in the book, either. There are innumerable scenes with Ellénore in which it's perfectly evident—and that's the exasperating part of this book—that if he only would do the intelligent thing, it would be good not only for himself but for the woman with whom he lived so miserably.

Bryson: Would there be any novels, Mr. Frizell, if heroes acted intelligently?

Frizell: I think there might be. There would be novels, perhaps, of the mind rather than of the heart.

Szamek: But, you know, it's a curious thing—you say that he had no dignity, and yet this man was no coward. He had a strange, paradoxical kind of personality: in his emotions he was Peter Pan, in his endocrines he was Casanova. But actually he was also a brave man. When Napoleon came back to France for the Hundred Days, it took great courage for a man like Constant to publish a signed article in the paper, damning Napoleon. Imagine if during the German breakthrough at the Bulge, someone in the reoccupied area had published an article saying "I hate the Nazis." That is what this man did; he stood up.

Frizell: Yes, but you must remember another thing, too—that at the same time Constant achieved something of a political record. He changed his position and his party no less than four times in one year and always came out with the party that was in power. You recall that the last time he changed his mind, it was to cast his lot with the Bourbons.

Bryson: But having defied Napoleon once, maybe he thought that was a record for life; he didn't have to do anything more. Anyway, he wasn't much of a politician. He was not a great statesman who just incidentally wrote a novel that people still read.

Frizell: No, he was a man of great intelligence who had an extraordinary experience with a woman much more powerful than he. He spent two weeks writing a book about it, and the rest of his life doing things that were really irrelevant to the position that he now holds both in France and in the intellectual world. On the other hand, we must also remember that he was a man who, at

the end of his life, stood up strongly and fearlessly for freedom of speech. When he died, some months after the upheavals of 1830, he had a funeral such as France had not seen for perhaps decades.

Szamek: But there is also a rather reflective historical reason for that. Here are the remnants of the great days of the Revolution, the glory of France, slowly dwindling away. He was a symbol of that. It wasn't his personal greatness. As you say, he had a little dignity; even the things he did that *should* have been dignified had a touch of the ludicrous.

Bryson: Romantic, I'd say, rather.

Szamek: In a sense, but look at this duel, which should be certainly a highly honorable piece of business. Do you remember the account? He had one morning come across a story in the paper in which one of the journalists said: "You, M. Constant, are like the Roman shoemaker who disliked the government, so he taught his parrot to say 'Long live the Emperor.'" Constant, of course, promptly challenged the journalist to a duel, but all of the women who knew him flocked to save him from this dreadful fate. They didn't want lacerated heroes, of course, and Constant was the great, weepy hero of the salons. So the duel faded away, but he *did* challenge. That takes courage, although it has a ludicrous touch to it.

Bryson: Yes, it has, but it seems to me far more interesting in that it shows the extraordinary complexity, the duality, of this man. Here's a man who writes one of the very first novels of a type which now we consider one of the greatest, the analytical novel, a novel which tells you what goes on inside the mind of a character. After all, most of the world's literature doesn't tell you very much about that except by inference. But Constant says: "This is what I did, this is *why* I did it, this is what was going on in my mind and heart, this is how the mind and the heart can get in trouble with each other." At the same time, he was a man who, as you described him, could gather around him a lot of young women and read them this analysis of his own behavior in which he took his own part.

Szamek: And they swooned regularly while he did.

Frizell: Well, it's a rather weepy novel. But this man, in spite of being a kind of ridiculous romantic figure, also had an intuitive intelligence, a capacity to analyze what goes on in the heart, which up to that time had probably never been shown in the world's literature.

Szamek: And it ruined him!

Frizell: He pointed out that a man, in order to have enthusiasm, must certainly not look at himself too carefully, with too much perceptiveness. He looked at himself with as much perceptiveness, probably, as any man has ever done. He saw himself in his true light. He knew what the basic problem was. He knew, as he looked at himself, that here was a man who simply could not resist anybody, who was going to suffer on that account.

Szamek: Yes, but what good did it do him when he knew?

Frizell: It didn't do him any good; he just couldn't help him-

self. That's the kind of man he was. He was almost Hamlet-like, you know, always searching and analyzing.

Szamek: And vacillating.

Frizell: He's like Hamlet saying "Why was I chosen to set the world aright?" This man was a kind of cosmic pinwheel, only he didn't know whether he was the pin or the firecracker. He was just spinning around.

Bryson: Ah, yes, but at the same time he was analyzing what was going on. You see, this seems to me the striking part of it: when he was away from this woman he was able to analyze what was going on in his mind, or anyone else's mind, with deadly accuracy and complete detachment. The moment he was in her presence he lost his head.

Frizell: Yes. One of the things he says on that score is that when he was away from her one would think, if one could look into his mind, that he was merely a man who wanted to seduce women. In the other hand, if one could look into his mind when he was with the woman, one would think that here was a mere novice who was impassioned with a woman but didn't know what to do about it. As a matter of fact, one of the more perceptive of his lady friends said to him: "Monsieur Constant, the trouble with you is that you want to seduce women, but all you can succeed in doing is charming them."

Szamek: I think you have put your finger upon the very problem with this man. The truth is that with some men love is an affair of the heart and with others it's a disagreement of the sympathetic nervous system. With him I think it was the latter.

Bryson: But there's still that mind, always at work, telling you in a very few pages as much about what goes on in a certain type of love affair as anybody has ever told.

Frizell: That's one of the wonderful qualities of this book and the thing that makes it worth reading. In a few very concentrated pages you get a description of a love affair which is individual and yet typical; you get the emotions that a man feels when he is about to fall in love, when he does fall in love, when the woman falls in love with him, and when he immediately falls out of love with her; you get the subsequent conflict. Actually, this book isn't so much about love as about the battle of sexes.

Bryson: May I make two qualifications there, Mr. Frizell? He calls his an arid heart. He was an egotist. The egotist doesn't always fall out of love immediately because he finds the woman is in love with him.

Frizell: Except that in Constant's case this is precisely what happened. You will remember the point where Adolphe finally achieves what he has been trying to achieve all along, and Ellénore becomes his. On the very next line Constant's first words are: "Woe betide the man who, at the beginning of a relationship with a woman, just when he is beginning to love her, knows that the relationship will not be eternal."

Szamek: He was *writing* when you came across this. When he was *doing* he didn't think that.

Bryson: Do you mean that in the actual experience of this love affair he didn't have all these doubts? But that afterward, when he tried to put it all down . . .

Szamek: It was a short cut.

Bryson: It was a short cut, but I would insist that he was trying to put this dreadful woman, this monster of intelligence that Mme. de Staël was, in her place. I think that the only way he ever could free himself from his slavery was to write this book. But there's another point that I'd like to qualify, and it's this: at the beginning, Adolphe doesn't simply fall in love. He sees a friend who has been having a happy love affair, he thinks, "this is something I must have, too," and he goes out looking for somebody to fall in love with.

Frizell: Yes, he was unhappy. He had been brought up by a cold father. He was without love. He was extraordinarily intelligent and saw that something was missing from his life.

Bryson: Can a book written as this one is—without dialogue, without dramatic presentation, without anything that a modern novel would have—still give you a feeling of passion and movement that modern methods do?

Frizell: Well, not in the same way, but it gives you something. It gives you something that you don't very often get from modern books unless they're of the very best. What it gives you is a true portrait of a man's heart and a true feeling of a very desperate relationship between a man and a woman, neither of whom can do anything about it and both of whom are perfectly and completely miserable.

Szamek: It does even more than that. In a sense, it is the sort of book that makes you wince. I know it does me. It's as though you had peeped through a keyhole and seen a tiger hunt of the soul. It's something you shouldn't really be seeing.

Bryson: But Constant opened the door!

Frizell: He opened it wide, and that's one of the exasperating things about it.

Szamek: And regretted it as soon as he did.

Bryson: Well, why did he go on reading it to the ladies, then?

Frizell: In his letters he says quite often that he never should have started it.

Szamek: I think he sums up his feeling very nicely in one sharp paragraph in *Adolphe*: "The laws of society are stronger than the will of mankind. The most imperious desires are wrecked upon the fatal rock of circumstance. In vain we persist in following only the promptings of the heart: we are doomed sooner or later to listen to reason." Now, added to this there is a comment which I had the other day. A very charming and literate friend wrote a note about this book and he said this: "I shall listen to *Adolphe* with great interest. Constant was my great-great-uncle. He must have been a bilious man."

Bryson: That's the modern, of course, looking back on the romantic fervors of the early nineteenth century. But along with those romantic fervors, there was something unique in Constant's

intelligence and capacity to depict himself. He depicted himself as a villain, which all Byronic heroes do, but he told what *kind* of villain he was.

Szamek: He expected women like Lady Caroline Lamb and Lady Bessborough, who heard him read the book in England, to swoon away when he told them about himself, and they did. They wept and were sorry for him and commiserated with him and mothered him.

Frizell: But I think that he was really trying to get at the truth when he wrote this book, and that the only reason why it has survived—as it has and as it probably will—is that he did tell the truth about himself, and that he was a typical case of this kind of thing.

Szamek: But, you know, I don't think he did it for as honorable reasons as you think. I think that he discovered the first and most significant lesson which all Frenchmen learn early: that the best way to seduce a woman is to let her mother you.

Frizell: I'm not sure that he was as interested in seducing women as in being mothered by them. After all, practically every woman he knew, except for the last one, was older than he; practically all were uninteresting to look at, although some were extremely interesting to listen to.

Szamek: But they were still women!

Bryson: Still women. And in the great love of his life, which he never really shook off, he chose the most famous woman in Europe and she chose him, even if she wouldn't marry him.

Frizell: In the very beginning, of course, she *didn't* choose him. He met her on the road, you recall, just out of Coppet, where she lived. They went home together and began to talk, and the conversation lasted for perhaps two decades. In the very beginning Constant, as usual, thought that he was in love with her. He made his play and Mme. de Staël said soon afterwards: "This man is absolutely repulsive to me physically. I could never have anything to do with him." Constant wasn't impressed with that and he tried something that he tried several times later. He pretended that he was going to commit suicide unless he had the favors of Mme. de Staël. Well, she granted him . . .

Szamek: The right!

Frizell: Yes, but only the right to stay and talk to her until midnight. Once he stayed until ten minutes after. Mme. de Staël showed him his watch, and when he saw the time he was so infuriated that he took the watch and smashed it against the fireplace. The next day he wrote: "I am not going to buy myself another watch. I no longer have any need for it."

Bryson: I think that shows why we're fascinated with Constant, because so few men could be so passionate and at the same time see themselves so clearly.

WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR

Imaginary Conversations

(As broadcast May 29, 1955)

JOHN MASON BROWN • CLIFTON FADIMAN • LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: There was a time, not too long ago, when Landor was considered one of England's greatest writers of prose and poetry. I think one not too undistinguished British critic said that he could be compared only with Shakespeare. But what a long time ago that seems now!

Fadiman: Yes, there have been enormous changes in taste. I should even venture the opinion that Landor, although a remarkable writer, a good writer, a scholarly writer—

Bryson: Not a great writer?

Fadiman: Not a great writer, no—is also a dead writer, dead in the sense that he no longer speaks to us at all, although he may speak to a few specialists or may still give pleasure to those who like to read a good deal.

Bryson: What about our great-grandchildren?

Fadiman: Oh, I don't think they'll ever hear of him except in the textbooks of literary history.

Brown: I'll agree that *Imaginary Conversations*, which certainly has been saluted in its various editions and versions as a great book, is a *dead* great book. But I would say that Landor's short poems, particularly, have abiding life.

Brown: The great poems, but not the *Conversations*?

Brown: Not the *Conversations*.

Fadiman: I think Landor will have only an anthological life in the future.

Bryson: I don't know. I'm inclined a bit to resist that dismissal, Mr. Fadiman. After all, you always think that he wrote just one thing, straight Landor. That was all—no matter what he called it, it was still Landor. And then you read a conversation like the one between the Duchess de Fontanges and Bishop Bossuet, where you've got this rather wily, subtle, adroit, intellectual old churchman and a sixteen-year-old little—what shall we call her to be kind?—girl who's been noticed by the King. The distinctions are not only delightful, they're real; they ring true. He can do that.

Fadiman: Ah, you don't have to sell me the virtues of Landor. I simply think, however, that in the large he no longer appeals to the general reader. I think the difficulty of the style is too great for us; I think it requires too great or too general a knowledge of past history for most of us quite to know even who the people are

that he sets up as opposing figures or as talkers; and I think the whole Landorian attitude of aloofness, a kind of almost classical iciness or removal from human emotion, is one that alienates us today. Does this seem excessive?

Brown: Not to me. I would agree completely. What always surprises me when I go back to the *Conversations* is to find, although they are based on the stuffs of life, that there is so little living matter in them; they are mainly from the mind; the blood that you expect from a man who is writing in dramatic terms is not there. The *Encyclopedia Britannica*, with the politeness of the *Encyclopedia*, says that these dialogues are "somewhat deficient in dramatic action," which is one of the major understatements in all the volumes of the *Britannica*.

Bryson: Did you read them as plays, Mr. Brown? Should one?

Brown: I read them on the basis that you yourself suggested—that is, what characters come through other than Landor, and what is the movement of conversation.

Bryson: There's not much?

Brown: They seem to me strangely inactive and finally becalmed. There is the play of mind but there isn't, as a rule, the contrast of will. The one you mentioned is a delectable high comedy interlude, though.

Fadiman: Yes, there are some lovely ones. But most of the characters seem to me to be marmoreal, to have a sculptural rather than a dramatic quality.

Bryson: But, of course, the reason why we're talking about this book is because it's the last that made a great stir in the world as an attempt to produce conversation artistically. And you say it doesn't succeed very often. Does that mean that the conversational form, unless it is drama, is no longer a possible form of art for us?

Fadiman: You mean in written form?

Bryson: In written form, yes.

Fadiman: I think it's perfectly possible, but there are very few people practicing it. I can think of, well, Santayana, who wrote a book of conversations called *Dialogues in Limbo*.

Bryson: But again, like Plato, he was mostly writing philosophy.

Fadiman: Yes. Didn't G. Lowes Dickinson write a book of conversations?

Bryson: He did, and they're pretty good.

Fadiman: And Walter Lippmann borrowed the Socratic method with high success.

Bryson: Yes, but look—we have to search our memories to find these people. They are good writers, but is there anybody since Landor who has attempted to make almost his whole literary reputation by writing conversation that is *not* drama?

Fadiman: No, except that—and here, I know, Mr. Brown will leap upon me—a good deal of the playwriting of Mr. Shaw seems to me to be essentially conversation and not drama. Of course, the play of Shavian wit is so lively and so vivid that it gives the effect of conflict, even though it is nothing more than the exchange of ideas.

Bryson: You escaped assassination!

Brown: There was no danger of it, because I'm in almost total agreement. For example, in the famous "Don Juan in Hell" scene from *Man and Superman* there is no action other than the mind at work; what you listen to is the mind—and that's the fun.

Bryson: Yes, but there we hear it spoken, don't we? And the question is whether we can *read* conversation. Can people read plays nowadays?

Brown: I suppose they can be pushed to it, but not many do, unless they have temporarily mistaken themselves for Olivier and wish to act in a local production.

Bryson: Why don't they read them for fun, the way they do novels?

Brown: Because they're not trained in the imagination that the director has. They're not trained to supply costumes, flesh, action—or to see. They need the stage directions of the novelist to help them with the dialogue. They want to be guided, they want to have somebody with a megaphone on the bus. That's the novelist's job.

Fadiman: I think we find it hard to shift from mind to mind on the written page: *John, Mary, John, Mary*. I find myself reading just the things that John and Mary say, and not slipping into their characters as they talk. I need the stage, the lighting, the scenery.

Brown: I think one of the disturbing things about Landor's *Imaginary Conversations* is the fact that, in spite of his own famous line about warming his hands before the fire of life, you have, a sense that he is sitting on his hands and there is no fire, but only the lamp of learning. The people come through superficially characterized; they speak for a fine mind, but the language itself is as cold as if Canova or Thorvaldsen had carved it out with their chisels.

Fadiman: I think the books of Landor are as fine books as could ever have been produced in a library by a man who knew a library very well.

Bryson: But they didn't seem to strike their contemporaries that way—and that doesn't seem to be at all the kind of man Landor was. He was one of the great British eccentrics, he was always in trouble, he had fights and quarrels and law-suits, he was driven from country to country, he seemed to have had absolutely no sense of decorum or restraint—and yet we find these things dead.

Fadiman: I think we do, but I don't think there's any paradox here. A man can be an eccentric, can be comically quarrelsome, as Landor was in his real life, and still have in his intellectual life all the classic reserve and aristocratic calm that these *Conversations* have. We must remember that Landor essentially was a scholar. He was a Grecian and Latinist of considerable proficiency. He felt himself more at home among the cold shades of antiquity than among his contemporaries, most of whom he quarreled with.

Bryson: Yes, I've noticed that the girls in the Landor *Conversations* get warmer and more charming as they recede further and further into history—which may be a mark of the scholar. I'm not sure.

Fadiman: Or it may be merely a mark of advancing age.

Bryson: But aren't we really talking about Landor not because of his merits, which are very great although, shall we say, demised, but because we're interested in conversation? Do we no longer read conversation because, as everybody says, conversation itself is a dead art? We're not interested in conversation?

Fadiman: Oh, I think it would be unfair to make that blanket generalization. I think there are lots of things that make it difficult for us to carry on conversations of the sort that, we're told, our grandmothers and grandfathers did. But I don't think the art is dead or necessarily dying.

Bryson: Do you believe our grandmothers and grandfathers really had those conversations?

Fadiman: I think they were forced to have them, in part, because there weren't very many other diversions.

Bryson: But think of the letters they used to write and the knitting they used to do and the soap they used to make!

Brown: Mr. Fadiman, for the first time that I have ever heard you, you are surrendering to a completely romantic notion. I don't think that the absence of mechanical outlets or stimuli necessarily provided minds to our grandfathers and grandmothers. Though they may have been lonely, though they may not have had television, still that doesn't mean they could talk. I'll bet they were as guilty of mistaking talk for conversation as most people still are.

Fadiman: It may be true.

Bryson: There must be mind in talk to make it conversation—is that right?

Fadiman: Yes. And I think that if the mind is not given too many crutches, too many helps, it may be challenged to produce its best possible secretions and to make the most of what it has. I don't think that our grandfathers and grandmothers were any brighter or more intelligent than we are. But I think they were more driven in upon their own mental resources, whatever those were, and that very frequently they were forced to exploit them merely in order to get some entertainment and diversion.

Bryson: It seems to me that one of the great unsolved questions in our culture now is to decide how much of these things that use up our time are just resources to entertain us, and how much they're stimuli.

Fadiman: I think they could be both.

Bryson: They can be.

Fadiman: And often are.

Brown: I heard someone, a young man of seventeen but of great wisdom, define many television programs as being just so much chewing gum for the eyes. It would seem to me that a conversation has to be more than just chewing gum. It's not the release of wind—it's the touching of an idea and the sharing of an idea, the exploration of it.

Bryson: You put the mind in it a while ago, Mr. Brown. And, of course, Mr. Fadiman and I have a very strong interest in this because, using these modern resources, we both keep trying to get

the public interested in conversation—not just to listen to us talk, but to start talking themselves. Isn't that right?

Fadiman: Yes, that's the idea of this very program, I imagine.

Bryson: This is the 765th broadcast of *Invitation to Learning*. After all, even the most high-minded of radio people don't keep programs on the air if nobody listens to them.

Fadiman: That's an extraordinary record.

Bryson: But don't you think that people *talk*, as well as listen?

Fadiman: I'm sure they do. I think that programs such as this . . .

Brown: And such as your own, Mr. Fadiman.

Bryson: You almost beat me to it, Mr. Brown, but I was about to include Mr. Fadiman's own program, *Conversation*.

Brown: Could I define the area of conversation a little more closely by drawing up some ground rules?

Bryson: Please try.

Brown: Could I humbly suggest some? I think that the absence of the gift of silence is not necessarily productive of conversation. I think one of the horrors of most talk, although it can be one of its most agreeable features, is the anecdote told only for the sake of the anecdote. I think the quotation, remembering what somebody else has said, is not the mark of a conversationalist—his dream, his one hope, is that he'll say something that somebody else will want to quote. Then, I think, you have to have an absence of monologists—I'll keep quiet myself in a moment—and you have to welcome interruption. It's the quick, unpredictable interchange out of which conversation comes. You just can't expect people to sit down and have conversation. It's lightning-like: it either strikes or it doesn't.

Bryson: You left out one thing, it seems to me, that often stops conversation dead in its tracks, and that's the *fact*. Somebody interjects a fact at a time when you aren't interested in facts. Doesn't that stop it?

Brown: I would say the facts of life can help conversation no end.

Fadiman: Yes, but the facts of life are very different from isolated facts.

Bryson: The facts of life are mostly opinion, anyhow.

Fadiman: I think one of the things that tend to deaden conversation is being well-informed. The trouble with us as a people is that we know too much—not in any profound sense but in the superficial sense. That is, day after day we are being stuffed with an account of the latest events; we know everything that's happened within the last twenty-four hours. The result is that by a kind of natural movement of the conversational muscles we give all this out again as soon as we find someone who will listen to us. I will meet you in the afternoon, Mr. Bryson, and I will in effect say: "Let me tell you what I just read in the *New York Times*," and after I have finished that you will tell me what you have just read in the *Herald Tribune* or some other paper.

Bryson: I used to say that the *New Yorker*—a magazine that

you adorned once, Mr. Fadiman, and left, to my sorrow—was a kind of test of knowing how to live in New York. If you never read it, you can laugh at what everybody else tells you he has just seen in the *New Yorker*. It makes you a wonderful listener and welcome everywhere.

Brown: To go back to the question of information, I mean *too much* information, I would phrase it a little differently. I think we know too much without knowing anything. We know too little about too much—perhaps that's more accurate—and we find that conversation is so frequently only the ventilation of a confused ventriloquist at night. He's regurgitating all of the columns he's read during the day without having assimilated them. He's the echo without the thought. He hasn't digested the thought: he has only remembered it and offers it as a fact.

Bryson: Are we saying that conversation is something that only people who are as smart as we are could possibly succeed in?

Fadiman: Oh, come, come—that would be fatuous! No. It's not difficult, but I think it does require a certain attitude of mind which is perhaps not as current among us as it used to be.

Bryson: Can that attitude be cultivated?

Fadiman: Oh, yes. I think you can cultivate the conversational muscles as you can cultivate the muscles that enable you to play golf or tennis, and I use that analogy advisedly. We are terribly interested in the play of the body, and as a people have adopted sports to an extraordinary degree.

Bryson: Which means that we talk about sports, too.

Fadiman: Yes, but in the same way we are less interested in the play of the mind. I don't mean that we don't like to use our minds; we use them for serious purposes to great effect. I think this may be part of our puritanical heritage, but the play of the mind—mere play, for itself alone—is something that we are morally suspicious of.

Brown: Don't you think also that people are imprisoned by particulars? The great conversations of the past, as you read them, have been able to rise from the particular to the general; they pursue an idea rather than an instance; they don't bog down in gossip or trivia. You mentioned puritanism . . .

Bryson: Yes?

Brown: . . . May I mention one other thing without getting into trouble? We are drinking water here today, but I personally feel that in the release of conversation a potative influence is not necessarily harmful.

Fadiman: Not at all. Wine can help, so can stronger liquors—and even hemlock, as I remember, has produced memorable conversation.

Bryson: It produced one conversation, but it also ended it.

Fadiman: It's the hope of everyone that even the best conversations will come to an end sometime.

Bryson: I'd like to know whether one has to have a *subject*. Mr. Brown, you appeared on this program for the first time, let

me remind you, on May 17, 1942. Do you remember that? You talked about Ibsen's *The Wild Duck*.

Brown: Yes.

Bryson: And Mr. Fadiman appeared for the first time just a month later—June 21, 1942—and talked about Gogol's *Dead Souls*. Is it necessary to have a set subject such as these? Do you, Mr. Fadiman, in your program *Conversation*, have something in mind that your guests think about in advance?

Fadiman: A program on the air, such as this one or the one that I happen to be working with at the moment, is a more formalized thing than drawing-room talk. We have to have a set subject. We frequently depart from it, but it always is a subject that is pretty general. For example, "the ideal spouse" or "how does it feel to be rich?" But we don't have too concrete a subject.

Bryson: Statistics are taboo?

Fadiman: Not taboo, but the introduction of too much factual information is a pretty bad thing. We have found, for example, that our best conversations are those in which no authorities engage. I don't mean when Mr. Brown, who is a great authority on many things, is present that we don't listen to him with respect. We do. But Mr. Brown never talks as if he had the final truth in the realm of opinion.

Bryson: That's the key to it, isn't it? You must have a subject on which any man's opinion has some value.

Fadiman: Yes. And one which can be, as Mr. Brown says, from time to time raised to the level of generalization, rather than kept to the level of the exchange of factual information.

Bryson: And doesn't this include taste? I've always thought that one of the most stupid of the great mottoes of the world is *de gustibus non est disputandum*—there's no disputing about tastes. It seems to me that tastes are preëminently a good subject for conversation.

Fadiman: They are.

Bryson: Why do you like this rather than that? Why do we not like Walter Savage Landor, when we talk so much and are so interested in conversation? He was, too. Now, that's a good thing to talk about.

Fadiman: It is a good thing, but there is an unfortunate tendency on the part of many of us today to assume that if a man advances his own notion and another man opposes it, they must do it in a controversial or bitter manner.

Bryson: We hesitate a long time to oppose, and then when we do it we get too angry, too involved.

Fadiman: In other words, conversation must always skirt, and by a wide margin, the edge of argument.

Bryson: Well, you mean that you *think* it must. Must it? Go back to Bernard Shaw: he believed that argument could be the soul of conversation if you made it so.

Brown: In the first place, none of us would have anything to talk about if we couldn't dispute taste. But one of the reasons we

get into heated arguments, I believe, is that we so penalize the argument that we edge into personalities instead of pursuing the idea. I go back to that. I think that's one of the errors of conversation.

Bryson: But isn't it true that the people who are famous for conversation—the French, for instance—walk right into a controversy without the slightest hesitation?

Fadiman: Ah, yes, but they do try to keep it on a level of reasonable playfulness. As soon as your whole heart and soul are engaged and your talk becomes a form of self-defense, you are not conversing—you're fighting. That may be very interesting, but it's quite different from persuasion in conversation.

Bryson: But I think the French are successful in conversation because they have no hesitation at all about getting into controversy. They think it's fun and so do the British.

Fadiman: But *fun* is the operative word.

Bryson: That's right—it is the operative word. They think it's fun and, therefore, they don't hesitate to get into it before they begin to feel defensive. We postpone controversy until it sort of emerges; its gory head raises itself in the midst of talk, and then we find we've got to fight because we're all so angry from suppressed controversy. Wouldn't it be better if we went right into it?

Brown: You mentioned the British and the French. You remember, of course, the famous line of Madame de Staël that Mark Twain picked up—that the Germans, though the best of philosophers, were the worst of conversationalists because of their language; you have to wait till the end of the sentence to hear the verb, and for that reason you can't interrupt. One of the great elements of conversation is irrepressible and friendly interruption—not rude fighting for the center of the stage, but interruption because the idea is so hot in your own mind that you can't bear to be silent another minute.

Fadiman: True, but may I modify that suggestion to this extent? We have found on our own little show—and I am sure, Mr. Bryson, you have found the same thing here—that one of the most essential things is respect for and interest in the mind of the other chap.

Bryson: Of course.

Fadiman: You must really want to hear him out, not from mere courtesy but because hearing him out makes your own mind productive. That is the essential thing, and that's why a reasonable amount of interruption is fine—but too much, I think, can be very deleterious.

Bryson: I think it can, because it keeps you from listening to the other man. The best way of becoming a good talker is to begin—of course, this is obvious—by being a good listener. If you really hear what the other fellow says, then what you say in comment on it has some point. But that dead stare that you get in the eyes of some people—you know they aren't hearing a word you say. They're only waiting for you to finish so they can jump in with their own

contribution. That's worse than facts, worse than statistics. There's no communication.

Brown: But what I had in mind, rather, was the congenital pontificator, the person who was born to sit on a tripod at Delphi. He's oracular. He takes over on the Far Eastern situation, or he's an economic authority, or something else, and there's no stopping the lava flow of dull information from his lips.

Bryson: That isn't even talk, is it?

Brown: No, it's torture.

Bryson: What can you do about this? Both of you have influence and power in the life of America and America's civilization; what can you do besides setting an example in conversation—anything?

Fadiman: Oh, I wouldn't worry too much about it.

Bryson: I'm not a bit worried because I enjoy talking so much myself. If I were the last person in the world I would still be off in a corner, conversing with myself. I think it is so much fun that I wish more people could enjoy it.

Fadiman: I do think that a program such as this, and my own little show, offer good patterns and good models. We have found from our correspondence that after we finish talking, sometimes not very well, sometimes very poorly, indeed—nevertheless, what we've said stimulates the people who've been listening to continue the conversation themselves.

Bryson: That's what a good discussion should do.

Fadiman: That makes us very happy. We hope they're improving on us, and I feel sure that they are in many cases.

Bryson: And one of the reasons why a man like Landor, who puts conversation into print, is likely to fail is because he leaves us nothing to say for ourselves?

Fadiman: If he's too great an artist.

Bryson: No, not too great an artist. He may be too great a writer, but if he were a real artist in conversation he would make us go out and talk ourselves, wouldn't he?

Brown: I think we've been a little hard on Landor. He does say memorable things from time to time. The passages on Voltaire, on Shakespeare, on criticism, on beauty, on poetry—all these are amazing statements, but they somehow lack the fluidity of a conversation. You never feel that it is true give-and-take.

Bryson: Although you know so much more about this than I do, could I venture the opinion that good conversation never reads well anyway?

Brown: I'm certain that's true.

Bryson: What does a dramatist do to make it sound as if it were good conversation?

Brown: He creates illusion there as in all other places.

Bryson: He fakes it?

Fadiman: All art is that kind of fake. It gives the illusion of reality, but it isn't reality at all.

Bryson: Then a conversation on the air, at which you are an

artist, Mr. Fadiman, is good—although it isn't the way people would talk under ordinary circumstances—if it has pace and drive and content and point and sounds as if it were natural?

Fadiman: Well, we try to make it sound that way; we don't always succeed. Congreve once said that the talk of the two wittiest men in town, unedited, would make one of the dumbest scenes in literature. I think that's true.

Bryson: In my experience I would say that some of the very best and most witty conversationalists are counter-punchers. That is, if you *ask* them to say something, they probably have nothing to say; but let anybody else say something, and they're always ready with a counter-punch. That makes good conversation.

Brown: I think the horror of the universe is the hostess who suddenly taps on the glass and says, "We will now discuss such-and-such." That is appalling, that is barbarous.

Fadiman: Do hostesses really do that any more? I've never had that happen to me.

Bryson: When you're around, Mr. Fadiman, they don't. They just stand by and let you take the conversation over.

Brown: No! I object to that!

Bryson: It's not true, anyhow, because you'd be just as likely to be there too, Mr. Brown, and neither of you would spoil it by insisting upon anything except your right to take part in something that flowed naturally from idea to idea. I think conversation is a form of art that is not neglected so much as we think, but as in many other forms of art, we have so many amateurs today that it's difficult for us to discern the real masters of it.

WILLIAM JAMES

Letters

(*As broadcast June 5, 1955*)

LEON EDEL

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ALFRED KAZIN

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LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: I wonder why we read letters in a case like this? Here was a very prolific writer, with a great capacity to reveal himself in everything he ever wrote; he even revealed himself when he wrote a scientific text on *The Principles of Psychology*. Why do we have to turn to his letters to find the man?

Kazin: I would say that there are some people whose charm, whose personal warmth and abundance are as marked as beauty or brains in other people. William James, in addition to an extraordi-

narly luminous and quick and vibrant mind, had a quality which is very rare in human beings, even rarer than a philosophical mind, and that was charm. I suspect that this charm had to touch people, had to get close to them; he *had* to write letters. When you think of him in his old age, in Europe, on the threshold of death but still sending off postal cards to friends, you think of a man whose genius was expressed in the personal. And, of course, in the days when men still wrote letters to each other instead of telephoning or telegraphing, letters expressed this quality in him.

Edel: There is all of that, and there's something else: these letters convey feelings. He was a man of feeling. The Jameses were very articulate about their feelings.

Bryson: One immediately begins talking about the family, doesn't one?

Edel: You just can't avoid it. They were a very cohesive group; they wrote to each other all the time.

Bryson: Almost the only nest of geniuses we ever produced in this country, I suppose—not our only great family, but a veritable nest of geniuses.

Edel: That's right, yes. I think, however, that there's something else that we have to consider when we talk about letters. Letters are very personal things; they're not intended for the general reading public, so that when we read them we have to remember that we're sort of eavesdropping, that we are listening to voices in another room.

Bryson: That becomes less and less true of James as he gets to be an older and more public man, doesn't it?

Edel: Yes, of course. His letters become more public. I think one can almost see him talking on the lecture platform as one reads some of the later ones.

Bryson: But I wonder if you mean to indicate something that strikes anyone who reads these letters? In his books William James is almost always, shall we say, the happy optimist; he's full of energy and vigor. In his letters he's very often almost neurotic, because he struggled constantly against ill health.

Edel: Those are the letters to his family, generally, and to his intimates. There, again, we're listening in on a private conversation, aren't we?

Bryson: But we're seeing the invalidism behind the force.

Edel: Behind the *worship* of force.

Kazin: Yes, but this goes back to Mr. Edel's point about his feelings: it seems to me that the great letter-writer is the man who is not bored by things which would bore someone else . . .

Bryson: Or himself.

Kazin: Including himself. You see, we nowadays tend to be very strict with people who talk about themselves, for we think that egotism is bad. But egotism is the lifeblood of literature, and the fact remains that he had this incredible ability to observe everything, to write it all down, day after day: "Unhappy this morning, ate such-and-such, saw so-and-so, beautiful trees, lovely grapes"—all this extraordinary vibrancy of life in James is, I think, the quality

of the great diarist and the great letter writer. Mr. Edel's point is exactly the thing to stress here—that feelings were important. They all had this, of course: Henry James Senior, always talking about philosophy and Swedenborg; Alice, the invalid, writing about things in a note of astringent skepticism, which somehow breaks against the heavy Englishness in which she's living; William and Henry Junior, in the midst of all their literary work—William's teaching, Henry's social engagements and all the rest of it—always remembering with genuine appetite to say, "I was happy this morning" or "I saw so-and-so." This quality of feeling, which I think we're losing nowadays, is very important. For example, nowadays if you ask someone how he is, you expect him to say "fine" and to pass on. You'd be terribly distressed if he stopped and told you how he really felt. Not to be embarrassed by the small, trivial detail of one's daily life is what makes for this quality of personality.

Bryson: But you're calling James a very bad prophet, Mr. Kazin.

Kazin: Why?

Bryson: Because if what you've just described is true—and I wouldn't quarrel with it; I think it's characteristic of the last forty or fifty years—it means that we're going back to the rationalism of the eighteenth century, which thought that feelings are likely to betray one. Now, James was absolutely certain that philosophy was going to turn against rationalism, toward pluralism, toward a time when feeling would count instead of reason. That is, he threw overboard Descartes and Spinoza and Leibniz and all those fellows, and came up with Bergson and C. S. Peirce.

Edel: Well, the whole point of that essay *On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings* is precisely an appeal for awareness, for seeing, for feeling. And it's very interesting that his brother Henry's novel *The Ambassadors*, for instance, is a plea for exactly the same thing: for feeling, for awareness, for seeing, but for seeing into things and seeing through one's perception—that is, through feeling.

Kazin: Mr. Edel, would you say this: not only is William remarkable because he is a philosopher who is interested in the concrete and the personal, who doesn't ascend into those boring glacial regions where philosophers are supposed to feel at home, but because he is a man who, like all good writers, has *earned* his feeling for feeling? When you get right down to it, only those who have been deprived of their full life, emotionally speaking, ever know what it is to enjoy life to the full. In *The Ambassadors*, Henry's beautiful novel, it's the over-puritanized Lambert Strether who feels most painfully the need to live. So William, after all these years of despair, of meagerness, of disappointment, somehow responds to the beauty of the world, of nature, and of life in a way which I think is one of the secrets of poetry. I'm not making a psychological explanation of that kind of personal wealth in the human heart; I mean that only those who've sat below the salt, who've been at the wrong end of the table—out of life itself—really respond to the charm of the thing. Again and again I feel in William the quality of a man who's been deprived; and I emphasize that

this is not a psychological point, because many people are deprived and never realize that there is wealth for them.

Bryson: I think it's very important not to be misunderstood on that point, though. You don't mean that William James ever was deprived in the social or the economic sense?

Kazin: No, of course not.

Bryson: The man was born to wealth, position, and opportunity, but he was deprived in a physical sense: he was a sick boy and he went through a crisis.

Kazin: I think that Mr. Edel knows more about this than anybody else, and I should like to hear from him on the subject of William's crisis.

Edel: All artists, I think—and it's one of the reasons they become artists or philosophers or thinkers—reach a point in their lives where they undergo a crisis, usually a spiritual crisis; it's something that happens within the consciousness at a moment when they are involved with self-exploration. The great thing about this crisis is that they surmount it: they can talk about it, they can write about it, they can put it into poetry; it overflows into all that they do. In the case of William, actually he was *not* a sick boy, as you suggested, Mr. Bryson. He was a very healthy boy—he practically tore the house apart.

Bryson: But he did know invalidism in his early manhood.

Edel: Yes, it came in his early twenties, after the Civil War.

Bryson: He felt too weak to join the fighting.

Edel: He was already unwell then, and he went through quite a crisis. It was a great crisis for everyone: the whole country was going through a crisis.

Bryson: Yes, but I was only trying to call attention to the fact that this was partly spiritual and partly physical; the things were related. This deprivation that Mr. Kazin is talking about was a deprivation that came to him because of limitations within himself.

Kazin: No, I disagree. The reason I was so careful to exclude the usual psychological interpretation of my term is this: I think this deprivation can occur only in a man who is not deprived by nature, but who has been deprived of his own proper flowering, so to speak; the crisis of such an artist is that of a man who is born very healthy, very abundant, very strong, but who by some odd twist that we don't know about feels that he is not attaining his full growth when he should. He wants to speak out, he wants to make his stand clear. Of course, there's always a father to revolt against, or a father symbol; there's always a coacher standing in the wings whose ideas are not fundamentally yours. Well, here's William—brought up in the household of a man who was a mystic, whose ruling gods were Swedenborg and Jakob Böhme and all the closet-dark philosophers of another century . . .

Bryson: A very powerful man!

Kazin: Exactly. But William's mind is utterly scientific, at least in its first stages. His passion is collecting fishes and drawing and microscopy and botany. Think of a man who went from teaching physiology to psychology to philosophy, and never ceased teach-

ing the human self. It seems to me that he is always a man struggling for his own growth. And this accounts for William's versatility—rather, his restlessness. It was always the family worry: what will William do next? Here he is—what was it?—almost thirty and hasn't yet found a profession. He took an M.D. between periods of invalidism. By the way, is it true that William James once thought of committing suicide, and decided to postpone it because he had made up a reading list that would take him beyond the date of his appointed expiration? I've heard that story.

Edel: I'm not sure.

Kazin: But it sounds like William, doesn't it?

Edel: Well, suicide was discussed in the family very openly.

Kazin: And so were reading lists.

Edel: For instance, Alice, the daughter, discussed it with her father. Henry Senior said to her: "Well, you're free to do as you wish. Your life is your own. Of course, it would make us very unhappy if you did it." And Alice said that that was all she wanted to know—it was the idea that of having that liberty, and of having her father confirm it. Not many fathers could have said that to their daughters.

Bryson: I haven't the slightest desire to look for a conventional psychological explanation, but it seems to me that one has to start by thinking about William's relation to his father, the elder Henry James. Now, as you suggested, it isn't just a revolt against the father. It's far more complicated than that. Was simple revolt even an element in it?

Edel: Oh, I would say definitely an element. There was, for instance, the revolt of all the children, led by William, against being dragged about Europe. When they reached a certain age they decided they wanted to come home to America and to cease being hotel children.

Bryson: And yet, William James was in a sense a hotel person all his life; in spite of the fact that he had two lovely homes, he always was deserting both of them to go off somewhere.

Kazin: Well, he was born in the Astor Hotel.

Edel: Yes, that's right.

Kazin: And he revolted, too, against what may be called the habit of affirmative fogginess. That is, there are people of a certain generation—this was certainly true of the generation of Henry James the elder—who are quite sure they know what they're talking about but can't entirely convince those around them. Emerson had that difficulty after a while. And it's so ironic to remember that this was exactly the elder James' complaint against Emerson. He said "Oh, you man without a handle! Can no one ever help himself to you without these tippings up?" And, in fact, you have to tip over the whole bucket to get at the elder James, too. But in all this, you see, there is hardly the feeling of anemic personality that we associate with neurasthenic suffering. Just the contrary: I think that such people are born into a frame too small for their gifts. What we call their suffering, their crisis, the dark night of the soul through which they pass, is simply an attempt to break the frame.

It's a kind of revolt which with most people comes in adolescence, in a struggle for physical integrity; with others, it seems to be a revolt in terms of their need to find their own level, their voice, their spirit.

Bryson: I don't think he found it during the crisis. William James went on seeking it, in a sense, forever after. Unless you want to say—and this I would think very wise of him—that he found a center in himself, but that he continued a quest to discover what he could do with that self.

Kazin: I think that's exactly the point. We are dealing here with a personality that seems to me to be very prophetic of modern genius: he's not only worried about himself in the classic sense, but he also deals entirely *with* himself. The self is the datum of his literary work. You think of William talking about the self in his great *Principles of Psychology*, William talking about the sick soul in his gifted lectures on *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William suddenly discovering with whoops, with squeals—to use his favorite word—with squeals of delight that Emerson was a greater man than he ever thought.

Edel: And William preoccupied with *consciousness*, which I think we cannot stress enough.

Kazin: Exactly.

Edel: He invented the phrase "stream of consciousness."

Bryson: And you think that this all comes out better in his *Letters* than it does in those works where he was struggling so hard to express himself so that he would be understood?

Edel: I think that letters such as these, which overflow with the personality and the verbal imagination of this genius, are bound to tell a great deal about him. And then we see him addressing so many kinds of people—talking to his family, to his friends, to his fellow philosophers, to his distinguished confreres on the other side of the water.

Bryson: And his distinguished novelist brother, whose novels he never liked.

Kazin: He liked some of them.

Edel: Well, yes, the early ones, but he protested against the later ones.

Bryson: He liked Henry James before Henry James became Henry James.

Kazin: William's tastes in fiction were on the whole rather conventional in this period, but then he was establishing a separate kingdom of his own. This is a royal family. Each of the sons goes out and founds his own kingdom. Inevitably, these new kingdoms are not entirely friendly with each other, but they recognize a common ancestor. Take this wonderful quality of abundance that you sense in him—you know, there's this old Irish quality in all of them; they're always sparkling, brimming over with the sheer joy of writing. I think of a phrase someone used about Stendhal, who also was a great noter of personal things. Whoever it was, he said that great writers need to write all the time, that they write letters because they cannot bear to have their pens idle. The kind of person who would rather not write a letter—and who isn't such

person nowadays?—who finds excuses for avoiding this sort of thing, is the kind of person who *can* bear to stop writing. But William James—and Henry, heaven knows . . .

Edel: Henry would write fifteen or twenty letters in one evening—after a day's work!

Kazin: This quality, then, is not psychological. That is, they're not trying to find solace for being what they are; they're not trying to get anything; they have to write *per se*. And along with this need to write there's always something more: this amazing thou-to-thou relationship. In William it's quite extraordinary.

Bryson: Which he keeps extending beyond the family to a wider and wider circle.

Edel: Doesn't that really bring us to the crux of the matter? Here you had a family, cohesive, concerned with their relations to each other, concerned with their relations to their parents; a family in which you had two geniuses, both of them seeking to establish their own kingdoms . . .

Bryson: At least two.

Edel: Yes. Alice certainly was very gifted, too, and there were two very promising younger brothers who went off to the Civil War, you know, and led other careers. A gifted father, four gifted sons, a gifted daughter—all closely tied together, all involved in these relationships. At the same time the two older sons are trying to establish those kingdoms of which you spoke, Mr. Kazin. Well, why shouldn't they, then, when they go on into adult life, be preoccupied with what the psychologists call inter-personal relations? Isn't that really what William is doing all the time in his philosophy, isn't that what Henry's novels are all about?

Kazin: Yes.

Bryson: And in the *Letters* William is spreading this family intimacy to a wider and wider group. You get Bergson, you get Renouvier, you get all kinds of distant, strange, distinguished, difficult people that James brings, with this marvelous capacity for intimacy, into his own personal circle.

Kazin: Yes. By writing letters William James also, I think, tried to bring home one of his favorite theories, which was, of course, that people don't use their real energy; there are deep untapped sources in everyone. Now, if you write a loving letter, a letter full of vitality, charm and wit, to a person, it recharges the recipient as well as the sender. It seems to me that every exchange of love—which is what a letter is, if it's a proper letter—somehow revitalizes in us that quality. You remember that Kafka spoke of how the Dead Sea is broken up by a brook; it's like an axe which breaks up the Dead Sea within us. In the same way, it seems to me that a student, receiving a letter from William James with this long, rich, hilarious, unbelievably vital commentary on what might be, perhaps, a very boring and difficult task, must have felt recharged, must have wanted to do greater work. This is the secret, it seems to me, of every true writer, every true teacher. The Irish have a theory, you know, that the reason why Joyce and Yeats are great is because they have a deeper personality than ordinary mor-

tals. William and Henry, too, had this overwhelming flood of personality.

Edel: And it comes directly from Ireland. You know that the first William James came over from Ireland, and Henry Senior was an Irishman to his fingertips. It comes as no surprise that Bernard Shaw always said the father was the greatest of the Jameses.

Bryson: There's a danger here of falling again into the trap of a conventional psychological explanation. But I've wondered a good deal in reading not only the *Letters* of William James, but also his more serious and sober and systematic works, if there wasn't an inherited mysticism which he was trying to exorcise. He didn't like it particularly in his father, although he was much closer to his father than he was to his mother, evidently. He wanted feeling in life but he didn't like the Swedenborgianism of his father, did he? He didn't like mysticism as such. He struggled desperately with all the powers of his splendid intellect to explain religion without sinking into mysticism.

Edel: I think that's very true. One has only to think of James as the originator of pragmatism, or one of the originators of it, to see that this is something quite far removed from Swedenborgianism.

Kazin: Mr. Edel, would you say, knowing James as well as you do, that William's longing for the concrete expressed itself in the religious sphere, too? That is, he wants to sharpen his father's more foggy theology, let us say, but he never loses his essential loyalty to that kind of spiritual ideal. We think of William's remarkable passage, at the end of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, on the need for supporting in the teeth of all evidence, scientific or otherwise, the faith that he still believes in. But he puts it somehow more humbly, more empirically, than his father would have put it.

Edel: I think that there we have an example of his loyalty to his father—that is, to his father's religious passion, his father's feeling for religion.

Bryson: Well, he felt it himself.

Edel: He felt it himself, yes. And, at the same time, the scientist in him wanted to inquire, to explore.

Bryson: I think you have to read his *Letters* to understand this strange thing about him. Although he was a very religious person—he *cared* a great deal about religion, he worked awfully hard to understand it—at the same time he never embraced a creed and never actually became a member of the church. It's why so many people, when they read *The Varieties of Religious Experience* won't believe that he was a truly religious man.

Kazin: I know, but the difficulty of being a genius—and William certainly was one—is that it encourages disciples to come flocking round him whom he doesn't want and can't, in the circumstances absorb. I think of this beautiful remark from his *Letters*: "As for me, my bed is made. I am against bigness and greatness in all their forms, and with the invisible molecular forces that work from individual to individual, stealing in through the crannies of the world like so many soft rivulets or like the capillary oozing of water, and yet rending the hardest monuments of man's pride if you give them

time." The "Jamesians," the followers of William James, seem to me to be running after someone who, I think, would have been rather horrified by the idea of disciples and enthusiastic devotees.

Bryson: But his love of energy and plurality and variety seem, to a superficial view, to be in discord with that.

Kazin: But that's the irony of a great teacher's life (and certainly as Emerson was a great teacher, so William James was one); that is, the great teacher inspires, he gives love, he really brings life to people.

Bryson: They go on to be themselves and think they're being like the master.

Kazin: Yes, and then the irony of ironies is that they become not themselves but Emersonians.

Edel: I think one gets the sound of the teacher in William James' *Letters* . . .

Kazin: Yes, definitely.

Bryson: You don't mean that in a bad sense?

Edel: No, no. Of a teacher who, apparently, was remarkable in his class.

Bryson: Even Santayana, his colleague—whom he never really appreciated very much—speaks of the extraordinary spiritual experience of hearing James when he got right down to business in his class. The nobility of the man came through.

Kazin: And the naturalness. In the *Letters* there's a very charming picture of William lecturing in New York and sitting down, in his frock coat, on the edge of the stage and discussing something with his students. I've known many people who studied with James, and, apparently, what he left with them was this overwhelming sense of naturalness, of fidelity to one's own experience.

Edel: Here again is this quality of wanting to relate to people, of wanting to give—this outgoing quality that we find in him and in his brother.

Kazin: Wouldn't you say that the quality of the writer is that he sees what other people ignore? The amount of life in life itself—the quality William admired in Turgenev—is the thing which he embodies so overwhelmingly. That explains his friendship for so many seeming cranks, reformers whom other people were too proud and haughty to bother with.

Bryson: He suffered fools rather well.

Kazin: He suffered fools gladly because he always had a suspicion that there, but for the grace of something or other, went himself.

Edel: This is the mark of a teacher who is ready to take on all his students, to embrace them all.

Bryson: The mark of something else: it's the mark of the great gentleman.

Kazin: Yes.

Bryson: But an *American* type.

Kazin: An American type. William cannot be confused with an English gentleman or a French gentleman; he's definitely an American gentleman of a type, I think, that is now almost as pre-

historic as the Indian. There's no doubt that in James there was this beautiful national identity. One feels in him, as one feels in very few people in American literature, the sense of an entirely original character that has national reverberations.

Edel: And at the same time, with his cosmopolitan roots, he had some vision of America's relation to the world. Of course, this was much more pronounced in his brother Henry.

Kazin: It is for this reason, perhaps, that William has always been acclaimed as America's greatest philosopher. It was not so much that people found in him a great philosophy—perhaps he didn't have one—but that they were amazed to find, in America, a philosopher who was so unbelievably and radiantly a very great human being.

Bryson: I would say that he is not so much America's greatest philosopher as the greatest philosophic American.

J. P. ECKERMANN

Conversations with Goethe

(As broadcast June 12, 1955)

WALTER COHEN

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ERIC LARRABEE

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LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: I'm struck with surprise when I think about the fact that this book, of a kind that we read so much nowadays—taking you behind the scenes with a great man—is so little known, when it is so good a book about so great a man.

Cohen: It's all the more curious because it is roughly parallel—on the surface, at any rate—to a book which certainly is enjoying considerable popularity now, Boswell's *Life of Johnson*.

Bryson: As a matter of fact, we are going a little bit crazy over Boswell, I'm afraid.

Cohen: I think it really does Boswell no service that we know so much about him. On the other hand, I should be happy to know a little bit more about Eckermann. This particular book that we're speaking about, the *Conversations with Goethe*, is largely a ten-year conversation in which Goethe turns out the interior of his extraordinary mind and Eckermann sits there and notes down the contents.

Larrabee: It is surprising that it isn't much read, since the book presents such an attractive and forceful impression of a great man in the autumn of his life.

Bryson: After all, he was past seventy when this book begins, wasn't he?

Larabee: He was.

Cohen: It's a radiant autumn, though, isn't it?

Larabee: Yes, and you can't help but enjoy some of the sense that he had of being sought after by the world, of being universally regarded as the great and famous poet—and not only a poet but a courtier, a director of the theatre, a scientist, a man who could let the great of the age come to him, as eventually even Napoleon did.

Bryson: To quote, I think, the best-known remark about Goethe: he was the last man in the world who knew everything.

Cohen: The color of the book is wonderfully established at the very beginning of it. Goethe then is in his seventies, Eckermann has just been introduced to him and made a familiar of the house, and Goethe has undertaken to foster his education. Eckermann had begun life simply as a peasant's son with a great passion for educating himself.

Bryson: And in this book he still is a person of absolutely no worldly importance. He's just a young man trying to get ahead when he comes to see Goethe, whom he has worshiped from afar.

Cohen: Yes, and there's not only an extraordinary condescension on Goethe's part in accepting him, but also a visionary understanding. He realizes that Eckermann can profit by his communication with him.

Larabee: Yes, but doesn't he also realize that he in a sense needs Eckermann? Here was Goethe with a certain number of literary leftovers on his hands . . .

Bryson: With *lots* of uncompleted stuff.

Larabee: There was work to be done. And Eckermann had the virtue of being young. One can see Goethe wondering if the younger generation will accept him, and here was an actual representative of it.

Cohen: Yes, he uses him as a touchstone. In a sense he becomes through Eckermann his own posthumous editor, because he leaves him precise directions: look over this, do this with it, do that, and so forth. He knows that Eckermann will carry it out. Incidentally, Eckermann is an extraordinary combination of depth and naïvete.

Bryson: And innocence.

Cohen: But is it really so innocent? There's a wonderful passage near the beginning of this book. Goethe has not long before met one of his last loves at Marienbad . . .

Bryson: Of course, he didn't believe it was his last, because even late in his seventies he never gave up. Not Goethe!

Cohen: No, he didn't believe it was his last—and it's better for us that he didn't. There's no reason why he should have been more miserable over the outcome of the affair than he was. But at any rate, the woman with whom he fell in love, a young Polish pianist, Mme. Szymanowska, inspired one of his most wonderful poems. And a few pages after we first hear of her she comes to Weimar, where Goethe is living, to give a recital. Goethe gives Eckermann a ticket for the recital, and Eckermann asks: "Is she, then, really so mar-

velous a player?" Goethe answers: "Oh, yes, wonderful!" Eckermann says, "Is she better than Hummel?" and Goethe replies, "You must remember that she is a very beautiful woman."

Bryson: Of course, that kind of remark may be responsible for the fact that all people call Goethe "wisest of mankind." He understood values in life: he knew that when you were listening to a beautiful woman play the piano . . .

Cohen: She was better than Hummel.

Bryson: That's right. She was better than Hummel because she was more beautiful. But when we have a very human book, a book in which the humanity of the Olympian is made perfectly clear in concrete and fascinating detail, how is it that we don't read Eckermann more than we do—while we *do* turn to Boswell, who is no better a biographer and who wrote about a great but lesser man? What's the difficulty with this book?

Larrabee: Well, Eckermann is also like Boswell in that he's a kind of celebrity-hunter, and he gives you some of that same sense of being a lesser man than his subject. But perhaps the *Conversations with Goethe* have suffered not only because of the high level of abstract generality of most of the remarks in it, but also because Goethe himself could hardly be said to be popular or widely known in this country. Perhaps the impediment of translation stands between him and the kind of reputation he might enjoy.

Bryson: Did you ever see a translation of a poem by Goethe that you could bear to read in English?

Larrabee: I really can't say, partly because I would not be a good judge of the original German. In the few I can remember from German in school, I would answer no.

Bryson: Well, my German is certainly very imperfect and pretty lame now, but I can still read a poem by Goethe with great emotion in German, imperfect as mine is, but I find it practically impossible to get through one, even when it has been translated by a pretty good poet, in English.

Cohen: Since translation is the topic. I would like to put in a word. It gives me a chance to be more relevant than I sometimes am. I think the best translations of Goethe, perhaps the best translations of German poets altogether, are by a neglected Irish poet. I daresay he's not neglected by everybody. I'm sure there's someone who reads James Clarence Mangan. And if ever you come across a volume of his, and should look in the section devoted to Goethe, I think you would be surprised and very well pleased. I want to say, though, that probably another reason why the *Conversations* is not so popular and familiar as Boswell's *Life of Johnson* is that Goethe is in no sense a character, as Dr. Johnson was. We *are* interested in Dr. Johnson's gait as he walks down the street, in the way he carries food to his mouth, or in his relations with all his friends, whereas there's none of that gossipy, intimate eccentricity about Goethe to give him superficial interest. We're interested in his mind rather than in him. One of his profoundest remarks, I think, is his saying somewhere that nothing is within, nothing is without a person; what is within the person is without. Goethe was a man of thought and life, but

life at a very deep level. If we are not interested in those levels, we simply will not go to him.

Larrabee: And you must also say of Eckermann that when he does give you the tiny, irrelevant detail, it's always subordinated to the idea. If he tells you something about the weather or the way the room was decorated, it is to make a point about something that Goethe is about to say.

Bryson: Just as was said a bit earlier—this man Eckermann had a special talent that Goethe was looking for. You can almost feel Goethe testing him out, asking himself . . .

Larrabee: Is this the man?

Bryson: Yes; is this man really going to do what I want done? But another thing about this book which I think distinguishes it from almost all other collections of conversations, even those of the colossal men of history, is that it really is *about* something.

Larrabee: I hesitate to try to pin it down in a phrase, but I would call it a book about human creativity.

Cohen: Would you say it's deliberately about that, or is that what it adds up to?

Larrabee: That's what it adds up to.

Bryson: That's what Goethe was thinking about.

Larrabee: It's not only what Goethe was thinking about, but what Eckermann was thinking about. He was fascinated to know how Goethe had done it. And Goethe himself was fascinated, looking back on his own life, to discover how he had come to be what he was.

Bryson: Well, he started that when he was quite young. Did any other man ever spend his life studying his own colossal gifts, as Goethe did, and still manage not to be a perfect monster? He's the only man who ever succeeded.

Larrabee: He had to discover himself, in a sense, if you agree with him when he says that he was at odds with his time and lived in an unsympathetic period; he had to find an inner source of vitality; he had to be convinced of the validity of his own genius.

Cohen: It may very well be that creativity and the explanation of the mystery behind it is what unifies the book. And yet it's also about something else. Probably a person who is himself interested in those problems might emphasize its being about creativity. But it's about life, too: how does one come to terms with life? And it's no easier—in fact, it's far more difficult—for a man as complex as Goethe to come to terms than it is for a simple man.

Larrabee: And for a man who did feel a little against the grain in his period, Goethe certainly was fully immersed in life from the beginning.

Cohen: This immersion—isn't that extraordinary about Goethe? It would be difficult to find another man who had as extensive a public career as Goethe did, and to think that it was all simultaneous with his extraordinary literary career!

Bryson: There's only one other man who could match him in that, I should say, and it's another German—Leibniz, who was a very busy librarian, mathematician, diplomat, courtier, and every-

thing else, and at the same time was one of three or four great philosophers of his period.

Larrabee: Maybe Leonardo.

Bryson: Well, maybe Leonardo da Vinci. But remember: Leonardo didn't print or publish what he wrote; he never presented himself publicly.

Cohen: And Leonardo finished nothing. Goethe finished everything. That was part of the secret of his success in life: he finished everything.

Bryson: To go back to this question of creativity, it seems to me to bring up one of the most interesting things about this book. You see a man of the greatest possible creative powers—I'm afraid we have to use that worn-out word—talking about himself, and you realize that all his life he's brought this tremendous mind of his to the study of himself. Nevertheless, Goethe was a very bad judge of his own creativity, because he did not underestimate himself as a great poet but he completely overestimated himself as a scientist.

Larrabee: Yes, that's true. It's rather pathetic to see him remarking, as he does at one point, that "excellent poets have lived at the same time with myself, poets more excellent have lived before me and others will come after me."

Bryson: He probably thought only of Shakespeare, Dante, and Homer, however.

Larrabee: But then he says: "The one thing that I can be proud of is that I am the only person who knows the truth in the difficult science of colors"—which is possibly the thing for which he is the least famous now.

Bryson: The physicists of today have said Newton was right and Goethe was wrong.

Larrabee: They were saying so even at the time.

Bryson: Right. They were. He would never believe it, though, and the one point where he is, perhaps, a bit ungenerous to Eckermann is when Eckermann dares to question whether or not there might be something wrong with his theory of color. Goethe squashes him; he will not have any kind of question asked on that point.

Larrabee: And Eckermann had gone out and done exactly what Goethe had told him to do, which was to observe nature, to be precise, to judge always by the evidence—and even Eckermann could see that Goethe's theory wasn't going to work.

Cohen: But you remember what a fine amend Eckermann made when he was in Italy. He passed a hairdresser's shop where he saw a lovely little glass bust of Napoleon in the window, and he thought that he could give Goethe a double pleasure. Goethe, of course, idolized Napoleon; also, the position of the bust in the window exactly, by some very fortunate accident, illustrated Goethe's theory of colors—and so he snatched it out of the window and had it sent to him in Weimar.

Bryson: And when it got to Weimar it no longer illustrated the theory because it was no longer placed in the same light.

Larrabee: Isn't there possibly an explanation for the contrast between Goethe's desire to understand himself and some of the

mistakes that he seems to have made? His theory about creativity was a fully worked-out idea in his mind that the good ideas, the daemon, worked in you apart from your will. You couldn't command it. There is one lovely passage in which he talks about a friend's wishing that thinking were not so hard. Goethe goes on to say: "And the worst is that all the thinking in the world does not bring us to thought. We must be right by nature, so that good thoughts may come before us like free children of God and cry 'Here we are!'"

Bryson: He believed that he never got any effect by consciously going after it.

Larrabee: And believing it, he had to accept the *aperçus* as they came to him. He would have little tricks for dealing with his subconscious. Eckermann tells that when Goethe in his very late seventies was finishing the second part of *Faust*, which was obviously work for him—he's put it off for forty years . . .

Bryson: And in those forty years he wasn't working, he was waiting.

Larrabee: Yes, but he knew that he was going to have to get down to it sooner or later, and in order to trick his subconscious into working for him he finished the fifth act and then bound it into a sort of loose-leaf notebook, with blank paper where the fourth act was going to be—in the hope that paper would invite him to see the finished act on its pages.

Bryson: It shows that Goethe anticipated so much of what we know now—that there is a kind of kinesthesia about this business.

Larrabee: Yes.

Bryson: You had to have the blank page in front of you and the pen in your hand before divine afflatus would glow through you.

Larrabee: And it was useful to have Eckermann, too. You remember that he makes a specific point of it. He says to Eckermann: "If I complete the second part of *Faust*, it will be in large part owing to you." So he was constantly, I suppose, keeping Goethe on the *qui vive*.

Bryson: Getting back to something that Mr. Cohen said earlier: Goethe was a curious combination which I think would not have been at home in any time or place; he was out of touch with his time, and yet found this serenity, this wisdom, this way of living. What was his secret? Did he have one?

Cohen: Yes, but I should think he was not quite out of touch.

Bryson: But was it a secret?

Cohen: I think the sense that Goethe had a secret is one of the things that gives extraordinary power to this book, but Goethe is not a charlatan and he nowhere says the secret is communicable. It's our feeling that he is somehow in touch with life and has adjusted himself to it that makes him such an object of fearful fascination to us. He has what we want. Whether he can give it to us or not, we don't know. We'll never know until the end, probably, but we suspect that he has it.

Larrabee: Well, Lancelot Law Whyte says of him that if he seems out of place in the eighteenth century, it's because he was abnormally normal.

Cohen: Yes.

Larrabee: And I think there's an over-emphasis on saying "out of place" or "out of touch with his time."

Bryson: Well, he felt it.

Larrabee: He felt it in certain moods, but probably not consistently. After all, his first and greatest success, and probably the book by which he is best known to the world at large, is *Werther*, a book which made a period for itself. Any time that it is read it creates this period over again because it coincides with some need in everybody's development.

Bryson: I think that's why I would be inclined to say he couldn't have been completely at home in any time or place. While he managed to express with this lyric power the sorrows of young love, he grew up—and most people never do. So that the mature Goethe would be out of place almost anywhere.

Cohen: He grew up so healthily! That's another one of the extraordinary fascinations about Goethe. So far as one can quickly call to mind, he's probably the only writer whose entire past was always accessible to him. He had no feelings of guilt about it; there was nothing to bar him from using anything that ever turned up in his life.

Bryson: But isn't it true that with him, as with so many other first-rate men, you can get evil out of this health, you can get morbidity. You can get all kinds of things. I suppose it would be fair to say that most people would regard Thomas Mann, not as the inheritor of Goethe—although he's the greatest living German man of letters and everybody's talking about him now because he's just had his eightieth birthday—but as one of the greatest interpreters of Goethe. And yet Thomas Mann, immersed in Goethe, is a writer known for his studies of morbidity rather than of health.

Larrabee: Reflect on what Goethe's own country has made of him. He was their first great culture-hero, surely, and yet he may have lent himself to the formation of the German character in ways that, were he alive today, he would hardly applaud.

Bryson: That, again, is true of any very great man, isn't it?

Larrabee: Boswell said at one place: "I can find reasons for you, sir, but I can't give you the mind with which to take them in."

Cohen: Goethe is not responsible, nor is anybody, for whatever use the publicists and politicians later made of him. It's possible to edit a man's entire work in such a way that you make him say the very opposite of what he intended to say.

Bryson: But this secret practicality, and I think it was practicality, is one of the things that baffles us about Goethe. Besides being a great romantic and immensely interested in his own personality, he was practical in the classical sense. The affairs of the world had to be done, so he ran the theatre, and helped the Grand Duke, and wore the decorations.

Cohen: And he started from such a common-sense position. There's nothing eccentric about his point of view, there's nothing wrenched or tortured, as there is in so much criticism today. It's perfectly healthy because Goethe says it's no one's business to solve the

problem of life. What *is* one's business is to find out what the problem is and what are its bounds and then to work as well as one can with what is objective.

Larrabee: And in this respect I can't help disagreeing with Mr. Bryson when he said, a moment or two ago, that Goethe would have been equally unhappy in any time. Reading these *Conversations* I couldn't help feeling that he would be happier today, at least as a scientist. He wasn't quite as bad a scientist as he's sometimes made out to be by people like Sir Charles Sherrington, who says of him that if he were not also a poet he would be forgotten as a scientist.

Bryson: But that isn't true, because his botanical theories have some standing even now, haven't they?

Larrabee: I should think so, and I would certainly think that he at least taught better science than he practiced. Some of these intuitions that you were speaking of earlier, Mr. Cohen, have turned out to be guesses ahead of their time. When Goethe speaks of how science must not inquire into the wherefore of life but into the why, it could come from the mouth of a modern scientist like Percy Bridgman. Maybe the mistake he made in his theory of color was that he compelled his thought too rigidly. Because that's one place in which he departed from his central conviction—he forced his thought along certain lines, and that's why it didn't work out.

Bryson: That's why he is a little peevish when Eckermann dares to question it.

Cohen: It is curious, though, isn't it—his saying that to achieve anything in the world two things are required: a good mind and a great inheritance. That's why Napoleon achieved, that's why Luther achieved, and that's why *he* is achieving; he has inherited all of this Newtonian era, and he has the ability to bring his own mind and theory into the proper perspective.

Larrabee: It was too bad that he had to come at a moment when the impetus that Newton had given to science and philosophy was still not exhausted. Goethe felt that there was something wrong. Where he tried to put his finger on it, he missed—as in the theory of color. And yet his belief that a mechanistic explanation of the universe was not enough has now flowered.

Cohen: I think you touched there on another of the extraordinary qualities of this book. You say that his sense that the mechanistic theory is not enough has now flowered, and undoubtedly there are other large ideas applicable to the universe itself which have flowered or will flower, and of which the ordinary reader really is not a competent judge. But the ordinary reader is a competent judge of some things. In the beginning we are somewhat inclined to smile at Eckermann. He comes into Goethe's room and remarks "What a beautiful day!" and Goethe says, "Oh, yes, a beautiful day. My head always feels better on an evening like this." And Eckermann says: "I treasured that remark." It seems silly for a moment, but these trifling remarks have a curious way of opening up later on and revealing meaning that formerly you didn't suspect. Goethe is one of the few people, perhaps the only person, who said nothing but good things, and they come from him so easily and

spontaneously that oftentimes they seem no more than trivialities, commonplaces, mere remarks of politeness. But let us consider them a moment, let us go back ten pages and reread a passage—and we come to say with Eckermann, "A profound remark, I treasured it!"

Larrabee: I would certainly agree that where the illuminating remark, the kind of wisdom-writing that forms so large a part of this book, bursts through on you it comes through with that sense of naturalness which you speak of.

Cohen: I think one of the reasons why Goethe could be nothing but so great is simply because he didn't strive, and because he knew that there were things more important in life than thought and intellectual attainment and so on; whatever he said came out of the depths of his being.

Bryson: But how much praise shall we give to the man who is a kind of completely lucid pane of glass through which we see Goethe? That's a sort of greatness, too, isn't it? I want to give Eckermann his meed of praise. It seems to me that he wrote a perfect book of its kind.

Cohen: Yes. He's sufficiently modest and self-effacing, and yet often there are entire pages where Eckermann is giving us his own ideas.

Larrabee: In a way that's useful, too.

Cohen: They are the context for Goethe's ideas.

Larrabee: Yes. Although there are times where Eckermann's remarks don't seem to be wholly significant, I think you can always say that he responds to the full significance in Goethe.

Bryson: And if you must go to one book to find the essential Goethe, this is the book you would go to first—and perhaps last.

HORACE WALPOLE

Correspondence

(As broadcast June 19, 1955)

LOUIS KRONENBERGER • WILMARTH LEWIS • LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: Reading letters is growing as a literary taste just at the time when we're supposed not to know how to write letters any longer. Perhaps if we could read more letters like Walpole's we might learn again how to write them—or is it an art so difficult and so suited to a particular time that we can't expect a revival? Why do we read Walpole's letters, anyway?

Lewis: I think that question has been answered as well by Mr. Kronenberger in his *Kings and Desperate Men* as by anybody.

Bryson: Do you want to make him blush?

Lewis: Well, I'd just as soon; he seems to be standing up pretty well. He said that Walpole was the greatest social historian of his age and the most constantly diverting letter writer in English literature, and I think that's true.

Bryson: And his age was eighty years, right smack in the middle of the eighteenth century.

Kronenberger: He virtually spanned the whole century, from 1717 to 1797. He had great opportunities, and I think we can say that he made the most of them.

Bryson: We don't ordinarily think of Walpole, however, as a social historian. Why did you give him that, shall we say, dignity?

Kronenberger: I think that it's apparent once you begin to dig half an inch under the topsoil of the eighteenth century. Hundreds of anecdotes that you've encountered elsewhere seem to have turned up first in Walpole. And then there are many great episodes—the purple patches or set pieces such as the coronation of George III, the burial of George II, the riots over Wilkes, the Gordon riots, the trial of the Jacobite lords—done with such enormous vividness and detail that they establish his right, I think, to be called the great social historian of his time.

Bryson: But that's not the whole equipment of a man who gives us the feeling of an age.

Lewis: No. These great set pieces that Mr. Kronenberger has spoken of are perhaps the best known, but for the social historian of the eighteenth century there's a very great deal more than that. I remember saying once, years ago, that I had found everything in Horace Walpole except how to keep bees—and the very next unpublished letter of his that I acquired was all about beekeeping.

Bryson: Was that because he was a man of such wide interests himself, or because he was such an admirable letter writer that he simply reflected all the things that were going on about him?

Lewis: I think his interests were extraordinarily wide, although his primary ones were social, political, literary and artistic.

Bryson: It's still a pretty wide range.

Lewis: Very wide. But since he thought of himself as the unofficial historian of his time—he was secretly writing the memoirs of his time, and wrote them for forty years, from 1751 to 1791 . . .

Bryson: And that was intentional?

Lewis: Oh, definitely. He did this secretly because the subjects were chiefly political.

Bryson: You're talking about some papers other than the letters?

Lewis: Oh, entirely—yes.

Kronenberger: Oddly enough, don't you agree they are of less importance than the letters?

Lewis: Yes, I do. Having said that he wrote these great set pieces, I ought to own up and admit that I think that he's much more important in the end for something else—because other people have been present at these big occasions, other people have described

them, though perhaps not so well. But it's what I call the eloquent detail that I think is most important. He's caught the tone of voice, he's repeated the anecdote, he's noted what was on the table or who was looking through the window.

Bryson: What they ate and what they drank?

Lewis: And even how much they drank. Actually, his position enabled him to become a great social historian because he was the son of a Prime Minister of England and had *entrée* everywhere. You can perhaps get that feeling most easily from a famous letter of his in which he tells about a typical day. He says: "I wake with a sober plan and intend to pass the day with my friends. Then comes the Duke of Richmond and hurries me down to Whitehall to dinner. Then the Duchess of Grafton sends for me to a loo in Upper Grosvenor Street. Before I can get thither I make the step to Kensington to give Mrs. Anne Pitt my opinion about a bow window. After the loo I'm to march back to Whitehall to supper and after that I'm to walk with Miss Pelham on the terrace till two in the morning because it's moonlight and her chair has not come." Typical day or not, that manages in a few lines to introduce most of the notable families in the England of his time.

Bryson: And also some of the most notable preoccupations of those people.

Lewis: Yes, that is certainly true. These glittering names and this rather frivolous-sounding day were really not as typical of him as has sometimes been supposed. After all, he lived, as you pointed out, eighty years. For a great many of those years he was terribly stricken with gout, which was a biennial visitor and left him prostrated for months at a time. In those long intervals he was at home in Strawberry Hill or in London, and he then spent what time he could in a very different way.

Kronenberger: Well, I would defend the frivolous day, although it's true that there are many times when he wasn't leading that kind of life. But he had to be frivolous to be serious, didn't he? He was to record the life of the great world, and he had to be part of it.

Bryson: Yes, but I suppose some people, who want to defend Walpole from our modern point of view, might say that there was a good deal of political activity going on at the same time.

Kronenberger: He was a member of Parliament for a great many years. He came, of course, from a very great political family. But I think it's the social historian that's unique and irreplaceable, that it's social history rather than political history that he made and wrote.

Bryson: You mentioned several things in that typical day which seem to be not altogether frivolous. Somebody wanted him—Mrs. Pitt, wasn't it?—to give her advice on a bow window because he was a kind of arbiter of elegance for his day.

Kronenberger: Oh, a great arbiter of elegance, a great student of building. He made the rounds of the great houses and was always fascinated by what was in them.

Lewis: Yes, he was. He kept journals of his visits to country

houses, very detailed journals with pictures and accounts of the architectural details, the gardens, and the location of the house. It was all part of his plan to record the arts of England. But as a social historian, I think what's important is that he's best about what interested him.

Bryson: But nearly everything seemed to interest him!

Kronenberger: Well, the journals that he kept, which Mr. Lewis referred to and which have been published, I think, in two sets of two volumes—it that right?

Lewis: No, there are rather more than that. There are the *Memoirs of George II* . . .

Kronenberger: And then the *Memoirs of George III*.

Lewis: Done in '71, and then the so-called *Last Journals* to '83, and I happen to have memoirs from '83 to '91 which are yet to be published. Historians, I find, are increasingly interested in them. As Mr. Kronenberger said, they can't compare with the letters in general interest for the common reader. They are not sparkling at all, thought they are filled with rather scathing and brilliant descriptions of people on the other side.

Bryson: In other words, he was frankly partisan in his memoirs, but in his letters, although he's partisan enough, he seems to be a very extraordinarily cultivated amateur of nearly all the arts.

Lewis: Well, I think that in much of his memoirs he's conscientious and invaluable, also.

Kronenberger: In the letters he's more than conscientious. He's involved. I mean that he's fascinated. He's got a correspondent whom he wants to charm, he's got a subject that he can perfectly handle, he has a gift for extracting just the proper anecdote, just the right description, just the final touch—and that, it seems to me, is what makes him a great letter writer and social historian at the same time.

Bryson: And most of these letters were written for purely social reasons, weren't they? They were written, as you say, to please somebody, they were written to tell somebody who was absent what was going on in the great world.

Kronenberger: I think they have a kind of bifocal quality. They were written to please the correspondent, wouldn't you say, Mr. Lewis?

Lewis: Yes.

Kronenberger: But also for posterity.

Bryson: You think he was consciously an artist?

Lewis: Oh, yes!

Kronenberger: Definitely. And he was very lucky in having a great correspondent in Horace Mann, who lived in Florence for—what was it?—forty-odd years or something of the sort.

Lewis: He was the British Minister there for forty-seven years. You see, all the chief correspondents, the ones that I tend to think of as his professional correspondents, were all people who lived away from London. This made it easy for him to tell them things that people in London knew perfectly well; it made it easier for him to communicate to posterity.

Bryson: It made it less artificial for him to put down a lot of

things that people of the time might otherwise just have taken for granted.

Kronenberger: It's really a way of substituting space for time, isn't it? He's writing to Italy, and at the same time to the twentieth century.

Bryson: But going back to this question of why we read the letters of a man who wrote them two hundred years ago—you say they're diverting, Mr. Kronenberger; isn't part of the reason that they're never letters about business? He's never trying to persuade anybody to do anything. I want to ask you, Mr. Lewis, since you're supposed to know more about Walpole than anyone else in the world does—you've been collecting and studying this correspondence for a great many years—did he write with the same force and the same literary capacity when he was writing a business letter? When he was writing to persuade a political enemy to do something else, or anything of that sort? After all, he was a very active man for a long time.

Lewis: We have very few letters like that, very few letters in which he's trying to persuade anybody to do anything. When his nephew, Lord Orford, became insane and Walpole had to take over his affairs, he conducted them with extraordinary skill. He got rid of a whole lot of supernumeraries that had been living on his nephew and ruining his estate. That's one of the most surprising things about him—how much address and skill he showed in an unexpected walk of life.

Bryson: He wasn't an amateur in the wrong sense. He was an amateur because he loved a great many things, and evidently spent the resources of a very fine mind, as well as a good deal of energy, on telling people about them and thinking about them himself. But we haven't said a word about this man's achievements outside of politics. We must remember that he did write other things, that he did build Strawberry Hill.

Kronenberger: He did, indeed. I think he said somewhere that no profession came amiss to him, from being a tribune of the people (which is perhaps a surprising way to begin) to being a habit-maker.

Bryson: A habit-maker—he meant a dressmaker, did he not?

Kronenberger: Yes. Quite obviously at Strawberry Hill alone he was virtually the architect and builder, because he supervised every touch of it. Then he had a printing press, he was a member of Parliament, he was a novelist, he was occasionally a poet—Mr. Lewis has edited very well a volume of his poetry—and he was a playwright, although I don't know whether the play was ever produced.

Lewis: No.

Bryson: Was the play any good?

Lewis: Byron called it, you know, the "last tragedy of the language."

Bryson: Well, that could mean several things.

Lewis: He wrote a little comedy which was produced, called *Nature Will Prevail*. To continue Mr. Kronenberger's catalogue

he also edited a great many antiquarian works. His *Anecdotes of Painting in England*, which he took over from Vertue's manuscripts, is still a most important work. It was the first work of its kind, and it has held the field to an extraordinary degree. Then, in addition, he wrote a very controversial history called *Historic Doubts on the Life and Reign of Richard III.*

Kronenberger: A controversy that is still going on very loudly today.

Lewis: Yes, it raged around that book for twenty-five years, and as Mr. Kronenberger said, it's recently been revived. He made a *Catalogue of Royal and Noble Authors of England*. And one of the most important things that he printed on his press was the *Autobiography* of Lord Herbert of Cherbury. In other words, although his main interest today is as a letter writer, in his own time he had a very substantial reputation as a literary man.

Bryson: I'd like to get back to the quality of these letters. For us, the juice has all gone out of the incidents, except as he can keep it there; the politics are dead; we don't know or care about the people—they're just names to us. What is it that keeps these letters alive? They're still read, they're still being published in popular reprint editions.

Kronenberger: And Mr. Lewis's edition.

Bryson: Ah, but that's monumental! How many volumes in that edition, Mr. Lewis?

Kronenberger: At the moment nineteen have been printed, and two more will be out in the fall. There'll be about fifty altogether.

Bryson: About fifty volumes on Walpole! That gives us an idea of what an exhaustive study of the man would amount to, but it doesn't tell us why a little popular edition, a selection of the letters, can still get sold in the book stores.

Lewis: I think we could begin naming qualities and go on for a long time. But certainly vivacity—a controlled, created vivacity. He was a man who knew very exactly what he was doing.

Bryson: He never gets cute.

Kronenberger: No, he never gets cute, although he gets whimsical rather charmingly.

Bryson: Being whimsical is a very difficult thing.

Kronenberger: I think he's actually better at whimsy than most of the more widely read people like Charles Lamb. Walpole describes what will happen if the Pretender comes; it's certainly as good as Lamb pretending that all his friends are dead.

Lewis: He also has a kind of malice that, it seems to me, is not only defensible but almost necessary in a social historian. But it isn't so much a personal malice as a kind of artistic malice. You can't be very entertaining if you're only dwelling on people's virtues, and he knew that. I think, perhaps more than anything else—and then I will wind up my list of qualities—that he had a peculiar detachment. The other great letter writers such as Jane Carlyle or Byron or Henry Adams seem much more involved in what they write about.

Bryson: Yet many of them were not nearly so busy as Walpole was.

Kronenberger: No, none of them was probably half so efficient and industrious. But Walpole almost never—except when it's something trivial, like his house being robbed—builds his letters around himself; he usually builds them around somebody else. Isn't that largely true?

Lewis: Yes, I would think that's true. And then there's his wit, his whimsy—that's an awful word, but, as Mr. Kronenberger said, he takes the curse off it by doing it so easily and so effortlessly. Those are two outstanding things.

Bryson: And he doesn't disappoint you when you go to him; a man who has maintained a reputation for wit through a couple of centuries has to be very good.

Lewis: Yes, there's never anything forced about it.

Kronenberger: I don't think actually his wit is very prominent. He has a wonderful gift for introducing anecdotes or repeating other people's good things, but he never forces the note by trying to be terribly witty himself.

Bryson: It seems to me that his wit lies more in the neatness, the directness, the acuteness of observation and expression, than anything that one would call funny.

Lewis: Yes, that's true. The sort of thing that's characteristic is the passage where he's describing a party that he gave at Strawberry Hill. He says quite casually, almost throwing it away: "Lady Greenwich came on her broomstick."

Bryson: That's all he needs to say about her.

Lewis: Yes. And I think another outstanding quality of the letters is one that Henry Adams speaks of: their modern tone. As he says, "You have the feeling when you read these letters that they might be happening today; they might be happening to me, to my friends." It's the same wonderful quality that Saintsbury had in mind when he said, quite seriously, that he would have to include Walpole if he were asked that old question, "What three works would you take with you to a desert island?" The Bible, Shakespeare, and Horace Walpole's letters. The letters would supply elements that the first two lack. Saintsbury describes these letters as being "the key to the eighteenth century." It's a key that you can turn at any time. While you're reading them it's very easy to feel that you are actually there, because his idiom is surprisingly modern; you don't have a feeling that this is archaic or pastiche, as you sometimes do with Lamb. It all comes bubbling right out of him.

Kronenberger: It's very cool, very citified. There's a certain amount of passing slang and outdated pleasantry, but on the whole it holds up because it's not poetic in the bad sense.

Bryson: And it's always personal. I was going to add another quality to those that Mr. Lewis has been listing: you can *almost* think, as you read these letters, that they were addressed to you.

Lewis: Yes; in his less important moments he is the almost perfect equivalent of a fine raconteur. But, of course, he *was* a famous raconteur—particularly towards the end of his life. All the contemporary accounts emphasize that. We see it very clearly in the letters of his last period. He would start writing them, but when

his gout became too painful he would have to abandon the pen and dictate the rest of the letter to his secretary. It goes on exactly the same.

Bryson: You can't find the spot?

Lewis: Oh, no—by reading it out loud you couldn't possibly tell.

Bryson: That seems to me to make the fact that he intended to write good letters all the more remarkable. It's just a sort of ebullient vivacity, coupled with a very fine mind and a very wide and complete knowledge of the world in which he lived. He just pours it out, which is not the way people generally do when they set out to write literary masterpieces. Perhaps that's one reason why those people don't succeed. But how did he maintain this extraordinary spontaneity?

Lewis: I think, perhaps, that he did it by keeping his correspondents clearly in mind.

Bryson: He was always writing to *somebody*.

Lewis: And it was always somebody that he was fond of. While he was writing, that person was in the room—and in the next room was posterity. It wasn't breathing down the back of his neck, but posterity was in the building.

Kronenberger: It was also an age when letter writing was really one of the social graces; he was writing in a climate that understood the necessity for being vivacious and for caring about other people's pleasure.

Bryson: But how could a man of this sort, with this enormous range of interests and the enormous range of achievement, be at the same time an active politician? Was he a very good politician, Mr. Lewis?

Lewis: Well, no, I don't believe that he was. His work, such as it was, was all behind the scenes.

Bryson: He didn't try to follow in his father's great footsteps?

Lewis: Oh, no, he couldn't do that. He spoke only two or three times in the House. But his activities were all directed to the advancement of his first cousin and greatest friend, Henry Seymour Conway, and when Conway became Secretary of State under Rockingham, Walpole was more or less through. It was characteristic of his entire life that he was a friend of the underdog.

Bryson: You mean outside his own class?

Lewis: Oh, yes, certainly. He was one of the very first Englishmen to protest against the slave trade, and when MacLean, the highwayman, held him up and nearly killed him, he wouldn't lift a finger to bring him to the gallows. He felt sorry for him.

Bryson: Ah, but that's the great gentleman, isn't it?

Lewis: I suppose so, but he felt genuinely sorry for him.

Bryson: I don't mean just in the sense of being born to it; he played the role of the great gentleman with a great deal of grace and distinction, as well as energy.

Kronenberger: He was, I think, the friend of the underdog. But from the point of view of his letters I think we're more fortu-

nate that he was the friend of the topdog, because it's certainly the great world that makes the letters as interesting as they are.

Bryson: Yes, but there's nothing here that is condescending or snobbish.

Lewis: There's something privileged, I think.

Bryson: Yes, but privileged in a sense that a great man and a great artist uses his privilege for our benefit.

GEORGE MOORE

Hail and Farewell

(As broadcast June 26, 1955)

CLARENCE DECKER • ARTHUR MIZENER • LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: In many ways George Moore had the ideal equipment to write an autobiography. It's surprising that we don't read him much any more, that he's so recent and yet so forgotten. After all, Moore had at least three of the things that make a great writer of reminiscences: he had genius of a high order, he knew a great many very interesting people, and he was absolutely chock-full of malice.

Decker: The fact that he is neglected is all the more surprising because he represents so completely the revolt against Victorianism.

Bryson: And yet, he extended—thirty years as a writer, thirty-three years as a man—into the twentieth century.

Decker: That's right. He was born in 1853, but most of us forget that he didn't die until 1933, at the ripe old age of eighty.

Mizener: The fact remains of course, that he does represent the strains of the Nineties very markedly. I suppose that's what makes us think of him as belonging to that period. But we must remember that our own time is a product of the Nineties. I once heard Edmund Wilson ask if any of us had ever realized that *Axel's Castle* and *To the Finland Station* were complementary books—a book about estheticism and a book about the history of socialism. These two streaks are in George Moore; they're in the whole period; they're in our time.

Bryson: Then why don't we read Moore, when he was so marvelous a writer? At least, he gives me pleasure of the very highest order—and he wrote about such interesting things. Is it because we take him for granted?

Decker: I think it's just because we're fools. We ought to read him.

Mizener: I think we *will* read him again. You see what has happened: he represented the great revolt against Victorianism, and was popular while that revolt was going on.

Bryson: Making him a typical Victorian!

Decker: I think we have to understand the period from 1837, when the wonderful Queen Victoria came to the throne, and 1897, when she celebrated her Diamond Jubilee. It certainly was one of the great creative periods in human history; it had great writers, great figures in politics, and it was a period of great expansion throughout the world. But unfortunately, it was also an age rich, proud, and drunk with sight of power; it was an age imbued with the notions of "manifest destiny" and "the white man's burden" that have got us into so much trouble in our own times.

Bryson: Which Moore didn't like.

Decker: That's right: he didn't. It was also an age whose household gods were respectability, prudery, and humbug—those "sentimental hypocrisies," as Amy Lowell once called them. They were all personified in the figure of Mrs. Grundy, and more or less identified with the Whiggish or middle-class tastes of Queen Victoria. It was against this sort of thing, in the latter part of the century, that George Moore reacted. He reacted against those sentimental hypocrisies, against materialism and complacency, against esthetic and moral blindness. The revolt was not a single movement; there were many divergent tendencies in thought and in form. But, as I said at the beginning, more than any other George Moore expresses most comprehensively the varieties of this revolt.

Mizener: Yes, I think that's absolutely true. And he did it the way so many other people of his time did—Oscar Wilde, for instance—by asserting the value of what is beautiful and what is esthetically good, regardless of whether it was respectable.

Bryson: Let's stick to your earlier plan, Mr. Mizener—as Oscar Wilde did on one side and William Morris did on the other. There are two strains: the revolt against Victorianism in behalf of a more socially generous and sensitive system . . .

Mizener: Look at the Boer War. Moore moved out of England because he couldn't bear to be part of the country that was responsible for the Boer War.

Decker: Consider the letter that he wrote to the *Dublin Times*, I think it was, that was later published in *Capetown* and then in the *London Times*—the letter exposing the nefarious schemes of the British to slaughter thousands of the Boers. The British government had to say that they were not planning any such thing. Moore always claimed that it turned the course of the Boer War. I don't know whether that's ever been authenticated or not.

Bryson: But it was like asking "Have you stopped beating your wife?" If you accuse somebody of intending to do something and then they *don't* do it, you can always say, "You didn't dare do it because I said you were going to." It's very difficult to disprove.

Mizener: It's very characteristic that Moore also said, as I remember it at least, that it cost the British government about three million pounds for him to have published that letter.

Decker: But I think it's an important point, because Moore so often is linked with the amoral, art-for-art's-sake group—the kind of people who never felt any moral indignation about political matters. Some of the most moving passages in *Hail and Farewell*, beautifully expressed in prose that has rarely been surpassed in the English language, are full of real moral indignation.

Mizener: I think it's especially interesting that when he came, in the last volume, to discuss Moore Hall and his brother and the life of the Irish gentry as it was in the first decade of this century, he does it with a very complicated moral awareness. He recognizes that his class is through, that Moore Hall is going to disappear when he and his brother are gone. He regrets it, he's sad for it, and yet he recognizes, and even in a way accepts, the necessity of it. That comes out even more clearly, I think, in the beginning of *Esther Waters*. Moore as an esthete, of course, always had to deny that there was any moral intention in *Esther Waters*.

Bryson: It was art for art's sake.

Mizener: Yes, but the fact of the matter is that the thing is loaded with moral intention—the evils of great halls, of horse-racing families that lose their fortunes and destroy the family in the bargain.

Bryson: But isn't it true that the surprise we feel whenever Moore takes a firm moral stand is largely a result of his theories about his early novels, his so-called naturalism? In those books he is saying: "This is the sort of thing that happens!" And he pulled no punches. He did what Victorians had been taught was not quite the right thing to do—he told what happened. And so we think of him as a naturalist, as—in the popular view—somebody who describes immorality. That's the Victorian verdict. When he turns out to be a man of the highest honor and of passionate moral convictions about politics . . .

Mizener: Then we're astonished.

Bryson: And we forget that those same moral convictions are implicit all the way through his early novels.

Mizener: That's quite right.

Decker: But I think it would be a mistake to call Moore simply a naturalist. As a matter of fact, he wrote a couple of volumes of poems back in the early Eighties that were linked up with the neo-paganist group; then he worked in the field of naturalism—he was very much taken by Huysmans and Zola, but he later repudiated Zola; then he was caught up by impressionism. Practically every movement in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century was reflected in one way or another by Moore. That's why I think, to steal a phrase from Mr. Mizener, that he really is the great chronicler, the great historian of the period. Anyone who would understand impressionist and post-impressionist painting, who would understand the great Wagnerian music of Bayreuth in the later part of the nineteenth century, anyone who would understand the Irish revolt against the British and the building of their own theatre and their own art—anyone who would understand these things has got to go to Moore, perhaps more than to any other person.

Mizener: But I wonder if that isn't true because Moore's basic

sensibility was what we could call, to borrow a term from the painters he was so fond of, an impressionist sensibility. It is when Moore is seeing things, and finding meaning in what the eye can grasp, that he is at his best.

Decker: I would agree that he's primarily a visual person. There's also one other aspect of him that I think we ought to speak of, and it may be part of the visual. He himself, as a matter of fact, was a fairly good painter, and I think that the technique he learned in painting was carried over into his prose style. I don't know of anyone in that period who could, in two or three sentences or in a paragraph or two, fix a personage more completely and consistently in one's mind.

Bryson: To do that, I think you have to have cruelty—this malice which was so strong in Moore's nature. You can't really paint portraits in two or three sentences and make them stand out unless you're willing to caricature. And he loved to caricature his friends; look at what he did to poor old Yeats!

Mixener: Yes. Do you remember his saying that Yeats looked like an old umbrella stuck in the ground and left by picnickers?

Bryson: And yet he knew Yeats was a great poet.

Mixener: Oh, yes, and didn't ever hesitate to say so. I wonder if this malice isn't connected with Moore's tremendous naïve egotism, which, of course, he understood about himself completely. When he makes a good phrase about somebody—never mind whether it's malicious or not—it's Moore's good phrase and it's going to be published.

Bryson: He didn't hesitate to make them about himself.

Mixener: Quite true! He very frequently made himself look as foolish as Yeats.

Bryson: But going back to what Mr. Decker was talking about a moment ago: I don't think we understand Moore unless we realize that in the beginning his interest was painting, and that he went to Paris and lived among the first impressionist painters. He always thought of painting as one of his chief interests.

Decker: That's right, and it's to his eternal credit that when practically no one was buying pictures by Manet and Renoir and Sisley and all the rest of them, Moore was writing about them; he was even buying their pictures himself and had them all about his apartment. His judgment in that respect has been verified by history.

Decker: He'd done that even earlier, in the case of poetry. When his first two volumes came out and were panned in the press—they aren't bad poetry as poetry goes—he had the wisdom to see that that was not his field.

Bryson: But he went on painting.

Decker: As an amateur.

Bryson: He went on painting, but he also carried that visual sense over into words.

Mixener: Yes, it was his great gift as a writer. I suppose it was a mistaken notion that he could do it with his hands, because the mechanical talent wasn't there, but the inner power of visualization

was what had made him think he ought to be a painter. It's wonderful that he had the courage to stop being a painter and become a writer, because he does it so magnificently. Think of all those characters that are set before you visually so that you'll *never* lose them!

Bryson: Moore's reminiscences in this book, and in others, are largely about his early days in Paris and his later days as part of renaissance of Irish literature. He talks about his apartment in London, but how much of it is about British people, really? It's about French people and Irish people.

Mizener: Yes, those are the two great periods. Of course, the structure of *Hail and Farewell* is so beautifully managed that even though he is ostensibly covering a period of only a little over ten years, 1899 to 1911, he actually works in the whole history of his childhood, his period in Paris, his family life at Moore Hall, and his relations with his brother—tragic at the end, of course, because he quarreled with him and loved him very much. But you never get lost: you always know exactly where you are with him, in spite of this tremendous richness of associated experience.

Decker: And the whole thing is like a piece of music. The opening, of course, is actually called an overture, and the body of the book is like a theme with variations—they interweave, they come and go, they have a haunting beauty. But, as you say, when you're all through with it you feel a kind of organic unity, as if you'd looked at a whole period through the eyes of a person who could see straight, could report straight, and at the same time could write with great eloquence.

Mizener: This, of course, is the esthetic George Moore, the conscious, skillful constructor of fiction.

Bryson: Fiction sometimes expressed as reminiscence.

Mizener: Yes.

Decker: Well, he really originated a new style of autobiography. I believe that he was the first writer really to employ what later became known as the stream of consciousness—that is, the first man in the late nineteenth century. Many earlier writers may have used the technique in part. But he starts out with a strain of thought, an idea, about which he writes beautifully for three or four pages, and then he suddenly brings you back. It's the same sort of thing that Proust employed, for example, and many later writers.

Mizener: There's something I hope we won't forget, however, in this interest in his craftsmanship. It's what somebody had in mind, I think, when he said that Moore was Edward Martyn's Boswell. There's a great realization of character in these portraits. I don't see how any one can ever forget the sheer character of Martyn, regardless of whether we think Martyn was the best writer of the Nineties—which I don't suppose any of us does.

Bryson: He'd be forgotten except for Moore.

Decker: Moore used him as a straw man, but, as you say, he emerged with flesh and bones and as a living person. That trip to Germany to attend the great Wagnerian festival at Bayreuth is one of the marvelous sections of the book; if anybody going abroad this

summer to visit the 1955 festival really wants to know what they were like in the early twentieth century, he ought to tuck a copy of this very large book under his arm.

Bryson: I think it's always a bit risky to keep talking about how marvelous a man is without being willing to prove it. Is Moore the kind of writer that you can take a chunk of and read in order to show these qualities that we're talking about?

Decker: I think there's a very interesting passage in *Hail and Farewell* where he tells of going to call on Yeats and watching with him the swans on the lake at Coole. Many years later Yeats wrote a poem about the place, too.

Bryson: In other words, here we have a great poet and a great prose writer both doing the same thing.

Mizener: One of the finest poems of the great poet, too.

Bryson: Oh, yes! But let's be a bit unfair to the great poet and stack the cards for the prose writer: read the poem first.

Mizener: All right. This poem is called *The Wild Swans at Coole*—the little lake on Lady Gregory's estate:

*The trees are in their autumn beauty,
The woodland paths are dry,
Under the October twilight the water
Mirrors a still sky;
Upon the brimming water among the stones
Are nine and fifty swans.*

*The nineteenth autumn has come upon me
Since I first made my count;
I saw, before I had well finished,
All suddenly mount
And scatter, wheeling, in great broken rings
Upon their clamorous wings.*

*I have looked upon those brilliant creatures,
And now my heart is sore.
All's changed since I, hearing at twilight,
The first time on this shore,
The bell-beat of their wings above my head,
Trod with a lighter tread.*

*Unwearied still, lover by lover,
They paddle in the cold,
Companionable streams or climb the air;
Their hearts have not grown old;
Passion or conquest, wander where they will,
Attend upon them still.*

*But now they drift on the still water
Mysterious, beautiful;
Among what rushes will they build,
By what lake's edge or pool delight men's eyes,
When I awake some day
To find they've flown away?*

Bryson: Now, that's poetry of great beauty, of great clarity of image, and Moore himself would have said "this is a beautiful and wonderful poem." But when Moore gets down to business in prose . . .

Decker: The passage I'm going to read was written about seventeen years before Yeats published *The Wild Swans at Coole*:

Bryson: There weren't so many swans then.

Decker: That's right; there were only, as I recall, thirty-two or thirty-six. But this is the way Moore handles the same material:

"The fabled woods of Coole are thick hazel coverts, with tall trees here and there, but the paths are easy to follow, and turning out of one of these into the open, I came upon a tall black figure standing at the edge of the lake, wearing a cloak which fell in straight folds to his knees, looking like a great umbrella, forgotten by some picnic party.

" . . . My thoughts wandered . . . to the autumn landscape, full of wonderful silence and color, and I begged Yeats to admire with me the still lake filled with the broad shadow of the hill, and the ghostly moon high up in the pale evening, looking down upon a drift of rose-colored clouds. A reed growing some yards from the shore threw its slender shadow to our feet, and it seemed to me that we could do nothing better than watch the landscape fixed in the lake as in a mirror . . .

"It was then that I forgot Yeats . . . and everything else in the delight caused by a great clamor of wings, and the snowy plumage of thirty-six great birds rushing down the lake, striving to rise from its surface. At last their wings caught the air, and after floating about the lake they settled in a distant corner where they thought they could rest undisturbed. Thirty-six swans rising out of a lake and floating around it, and settling down in it, is an unusual sight; it conveys the suggestion of fairyland, perhaps because thirty-six wild swans are so different from the silly china swan which sometimes floats and hisses in melancholy whiteness up and down a stone basin. That is all we know of swans—all I knew until the thirty-six rose out of the hushed lake at our feet, and prompted me to turn to Yeats, saying 'You're writing your poem in its natural atmosphere.'"

Bryson: I don't know how you gentlemen feel about it—one doesn't have to make comparisons—but that is perfect prose. There's no attempt there to imitate poetry. The cadences are completely prose cadences, and yet they're beautiful.

Decker: And all the way through it's diffused with a kind of thought. I think it's important, in talking about Moore, to stress the fact that he *was* malicious. After all, it was he who wrote about the very Ireland that he was trying to reconstruct: "It is the plain duty of every Irishman to disassociate himself from all memories

of Ireland, Ireland being a fatal disease—fatal to Englishmen, and doubly fatal to Irishmen.” He loved to write sentences of that sort. On the other hand, he could write such beautiful things as the passage we’ve just read about Coole.

Mizner: And how infallibly his eye goes to the symbolic force of those wild swans, without ever pushing it beyond the point that prose can support. This remains for us a factual description of an experience, we believe in it as something that happened—and yet, he’s got the wildness, the clamor of the wings, all the crucial things that Yeats put in his poem.

Decker: I would agree absolutely; there are whole sections of Moore that in the hands of a lesser person could have become the worst kind of sentimentality.

Mizner: Exactly.

Decker: And there are times when *he* verges on it. Once or twice when I was rereading *Hail and Farewell* this past week, I said to myself “this is a terribly sentimental passage,” and then when I had finished it I could see the impact of a hard, strong, vigorous mind at work on it; so that all the romantic emotion—he was as much a romanticist as a naturalist when he was really writing out of his heart—and all the beauty of spirit are poured into those lines.

Bryson: After all, he was still an Irishman. He never got over being one.

Decker: He came from the west of Ireland, from the wonderful district around Galway and Mayo and Connemara, which for me is still the great Ireland of Cuchulain and the legends of the past.

Bryson: You’ve got the disease, Mr. Decker! It did bother him, though, didn’t it—this romanticism in the people he worked with, Yeats and Maud Gonne and Synge and all the rest of them? In his attempt to take a part in the reconstruction of Irish literature and Irish drama, it bothered him that these people were so, well, romantic, wouldn’t you say?

Mizner: There was a part of George Moore that was a very shrewd and sensible business man.

Bryson: He didn’t believe in revolution.

Mizner: No, he certainly did not. I’ve been told an anecdote about Maude Gonne and him—that she once called a meeting of five revolutionaries, as she thought. Four of them were already with her when there appeared at the door this elegant, dandified figure in his yellow gloves, with his stick and his carefully brushed hat. He looked around the room and said, “Madam McBride, and gentlemen, I see what this meeting is for. Good Morning, Madam McBride and gentlemen”—and left.

Decker: We’ve talked a good deal about Moore as a realist and a naturalist and a romanticist, but Moore himself always said that he was none of these things. He said that the real argument is not between the romanticist and the realist, but between the thought-mind and the fact-mind. And he wrote a wonderful short paragraph about what his real theory was in the field of esthetics: “For it is thought, and thought only, that divides right from wrong; it is

thought, and thought only, that elevates or degrades human deeds and desires; therefore turgid accounts of massacred Negroes, and turgid accounts of fornicating peasants, are in like measure distasteful to the true artist . . . What I wish to establish here is that it is a vain and fruitless task to narrate any fact about life unless it has been tempered and purified in thought and stamped by thought with a specific value." That, I think, is really at the nub of the matter. That is why, of course, George Moore the writer was able to make George Moore the character, who figures in *Hail and Farewell*, a completely rounded character. People kept saying about this book, you know, when it came out, "Could Moore possibly have known how he has exposed himself?" Well, if he didn't know perfectly well how he had exposed himself, he wouldn't have been able to do it so well. He is a Boswell in that respect.

Bryson: Boswell to himself, as well as to others.

Mizner: Well, of course, Boswell was a Boswell to himself too.

Bryson: But Moore was more so, I think, than Boswell, because he does it more directly. But that comparison doesn't matter. It seems to me that the point is whether or not there's any advantage in going back to him.

Decker: I think that eventually there will be a revival of interest in Moore. He's gone a little out of fashion. I went to the library to find what books of his were still in print, and there are only four. The reason is that the revolt against Victorianism has spent its force; we're reevaluating Victorianism. But the time is coming, I think when Moore is going to have a great revival—in the next ten, fifteen or twenty years.

Bryson: And I would warn anybody not to get within his reach, because he's a tempter!

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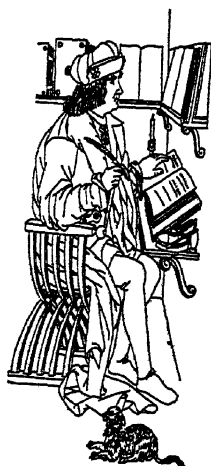
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LA FONTAINE

Fables

(As broadcast July 3, 1955)

LEO GURKO

HENRI PEYRE

LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: I suppose La Fontaine is as typical a French writer as one could discover. And yet, in a very curious way, he's the source of a misunderstanding about himself and about the French people, too, because everybody speaks of him as the very epitome of wit.

Peyre: Yes, the word really is not the most apposite where La Fontaine is concerned. It is probably a mistake to use it. La Fontaine is really a great *humorist*, a moralist in the nobler sense of the word, and, the French often say, their greatest epic poet. Many of them call him their Homer, because he has served for the erudition of French youth in exactly the same manner as Homer did for the Greeks.

Bryson: Although he wrote not about heroes, but about rats and mice and lions and foxes and other lovely animals. Of course, if we are to discuss him in a series of programs devoted to nature, one has first to decide whether he really was writing about nature or about human beings under the cover of his little animals.

Gurko: He himself tells us in his introduction to the first series of *Fables* that his intention is to instruct mankind. He makes no bones about the fact that his real interest is in men. And, indeed, one sees in the *Fables* a wide-ranging, sharp, often piercing insight into human nature. One of the reasons that I think La Fontaine, even in inadequate translations in English, is so appealing to us is that we recognize in his animals reflections of ourselves, of our friends, of our conceptions of humanity.

Bryson: In ourselves it hurts.

Gurko: Yes, it does. But in our usual manner, whenever La Fontaine scores a particularly sharp, satirical point, we generally associate it with people we know rather than with ourselves.

Bryson: I would go so far as to say that La Fontaine is in many ways superior to Homer as a teacher of the young. I would rather have people behave the way La Fontaine urges them to than the way Homer suggests.

Peyre: Of course, Homer thought he was *not* a didactic poet; La Fontaine thought he was, or tried to be, or perhaps pretended that he was. Most of the writers of his own age did. They more or less pretended that they were preaching moral lessons. At bottom, La Fontaine knew that there was only one rule in literature. He asserted it: to please the public. But he also wrote to please himself—to display his own wit and humor and personality, and his own somewhat selfish type of morality—rather than to instruct the young. In fact, La Fontaine was hardly interested in his own son—he had one, you know—

and he was never interested in other children. The elderly at that time felt that children were just people with whom something was wrong because they weren't adults yet.

Bryson: But I think, Mr. Peyre, that there's an awful lot to be explained about La Fontaine's reputation, in addition to the fact that he really is, as you say, a moralist and a humorist. Here's a man of a good provincial family, who lives in the court of Louis XIV and somehow or other becomes a great classic by being natural, by talking about animals, by seeming to be as different from the Sun King as one can get. How did he manage to do that?

Peyre: La Fontaine was a very clever and skillful man in his own private life, which is reflected to some extent in his *Fables*. He knew that his age was a very dangerous one for a great minor poet. The danger, obviously, was that he might be entrapped in pomp and ceremony and might become merely a court poet, as so many of his contemporaries did. In order to avoid all that he chose the genre of the fable, which had been left alone by all of his contemporaries. In the fable he enjoyed the same freedom that the Greeks had enjoyed before him.

Gurko: And I suppose that's one reason why he warns us very often in his fables against luxury, against the life of the excessively wealthy, against complicated civilization in the social sense of the word. One finds in his stories a constant emphasis, if not on the virtues, at any rate on the attractions and safeties of a simple life.

Bryson: That's an important point, isn't it? Not on the *virtues*. He seems to be more fascinated by the vices and follies of men than by their nobilities.

Gurko: For the most part—but then every once in a while one reads a fable in which he talks about admirable things in human nature. For example, that wonderful fable about the wolf and the dog. The wolf is not willing to give up its freedom simply for the sake of three square meals a day, which the dog is willing to do; the wolf would rather live in a state of semi-starvation than to give up his liberty. And this note is constantly sounded in La Fontaine—this theme of personal liberty, of living independently within one's self, amidst the dangerous society that Mr. Peyre spoke of a moment ago.

Bryson: There's the wonderful line where the wolf asks, "What's that thing on your neck?" A collar!

Gurko: And one of the attractions of La Fontaine is that in references of that kind we instantly recognize ourselves—not simply the literal collar, but all the traps and conventions and pressures which force us into the confined and enclosed life against which he warns us.

Peyre: Along with Molière, he's one of the two greatest writers of the seventeenth century who made it a point to take away from men and women the masks that they like to put over their faces—masks that conceal sometimes our own instinct for possession and tyranny, sometimes all the lewdness and vility that comes into love, and sometimes our thirst for power and other somewhat base motives. La Fontaine tried to take all that away, to see and portray man as he was. He found it, of course, much easier to borrow the guise of animals in order to do that.

Gurko: And what makes it all the more astonishing is that the seventeenth century in France, the classical century, was in some ways the most artificial. To live inside the framework of that kind of century and to preserve one's own integrity, reputation, and independence was a feat of the first order.

Bryson: Not to mention preserving one's neck. Hiding the vices of man behind the masks of animals saved him sometimes from seeming to shoot his arrows a little too close to the throne or to some of the people around it. Wasn't Molière in trouble occasionally? Wasn't everybody who said anything about vices in trouble?

Peyre: La Fontaine was not, of course, in too good odor with the court, but on the whole he managed to get away with saying a great many very frank things to his contemporaries, probably more than anyone else in that era.

Gurko: This seems to us all the more astonishing because many of the fables deal with what one can only regard as social thrusts at kings and noblemen and princes, whom he frequently regards as dangerous people. He's always warning the great mass of the poor, with whom he somehow obscurely associates himself, against the pomp and perils of the great: never trust the great; never form alliances with them; travel lightly through life, rather than burden yourself with property and wealth.

Bryson: And yet he lived in the court.

Peyre: On the edges of the court.

Gurko: And though he incurred the enmity of Louis XIV, he did finally manage to get into the French Academy. I suppose this can be explained by the geniality, the humor, the good-natured tone of the fables themselves. Since one hardly takes him seriously as a great social philosopher, he's able to get away with these little digs from time to time without treading too heavily on the corns of the great.

Peyre: Of course, it would be very dangerous to exaggerate and to turn La Fontaine into a social revolutionist or even into a social thinker. All that you say is quite true. It comes in part from the Middle Ages, where very often the lowly were praised because, in a way, heaven was to be theirs and they were suffering on earth unjustly. And it comes from Horace and some of the great writers of antiquity whom La Fontaine loved and imitated. But it was also part of his own temperament and of his own nature.

Gurko: One of the things that interests me about him is that although he admired La Rochefoucauld, the great cynic of the seventeenth century, he himself was not a cynic but much closer to what we would call a realist. Many of his fables deal with the vanity, greed, selfishness, and smugness of human nature. And just as one is ready to believe that La Fontaine is truly a La Rochefoucauld disguised in the form of a fabulist, one comes to a fable in which he talks about the admirable sides of human nature. He has a kind of well-balanced view of humanity, which is one of the enjoyable things about him.

Bryson: I think I'd quarrel a little on the balance. I just read a long selection of the *Fables*—I wouldn't say I'd reread all of them—and I was struck by the fact that he weighs down a little too heavily on the stupidities, the vanities, the selfishness. As a matter of fact, I

was very much disturbed by one of the later fables, the one about the old man who was planting an orchard. The young men come and say, "Why are you planting an orchard? You're going to die soon anyhow." And I thought, in my innocence, that La Fontaine was going to respond with what I thought would be—I'm subject to your correction, Mr. Peyre—a very profound French sentiment: one must cultivate one's garden. But he doesn't say that at all: he says the old man outlived the young men; they should have kept their mouths shut, because you never know what's going to happen! Which was very surprising. In other words, he avoided an assertion of nobility and retreated into a kind of minor cynicism. He sometimes does that.

Peyre: Yes, although I believe that you put it a little crudely, perhaps a little unfairly to La Fontaine. Elsewhere La Fontaine has said many times that the noblest philosophy of all is to cultivate one's garden, to do a little good around oneself, and not to be too ambitious. But when he wrote that particular fable he was a very old man, and he felt that old men should have a larger place in the world and not always be subject to the quips and the rivalries of young men. And he said two things there: that one needs the flame and flamboyance of young men, but that, on the other hand, old men are not completely useless in the world; they have a message of patience and of clean, decent labor to offer to the young men, and maybe also one of inner wisdom.

Bryson: Well, I think you're probably right. But I still can't get over the feeling that La Fontaine is more amused by man's stupidities than he is inspired by his great qualities.

Gurko: And yet, certainly, another admirable quality of human nature that keeps cropping up in La Fontaine is the sense of gratitude. You remember the famous fable about the lion and the mouse, which everybody knows. Now the theme of gratitude there—not of selfishness, but of gratitude—occurs over and over again. That's enough, at any rate, to make us feel that he isn't giving us simply the disagreeable and the unadmirable and the satirized aspects of mankind.

Bryson: Mr. Gurko, don't forget the fable of the lion that opened his mouth and let one of the little animals fix his tooth. The little animal wanted to be paid, but the lion said, "You had your head in the lion's mouth and got away safely—that's pay enough for you!" That's the other side of it.

Peyre: One must remember that La Fontaine came after an age which had wanted greatness perhaps too much—the age of Corneille and Descartes and all the others who had thought that everything was possible for human will power and human reason. La Fontaine is reacting against those very lofty and very exacting moralists and philosophers; he thinks that it's better to try for less and to achieve it than to have such an exacting and fastidious conception of duty that we can expect it only from other people, never ourselves.

Gurko: I'm impressed by how much La Fontaine expresses the French sense of the limitations of life. Life itself is a very limited thing, much as are nature and gardens and trees and avenues in France. We don't find in La Fontaine—we don't find in the French generally—the sense of life being filled with unlimited possibilities, as

in America or in England or even in Germany. And one feels this sense of definition and outline in the form of La Fontaine's fables, which are always limited and exact and have a very sharp, clear outline. One might say that one of the charms of the fables, and certainly one of the essences of La Fontaine's style, is this sense of the perfection of the limited—which is a very great and, one might almost say, a very unique French art.

Bryson: That's the classical spirit, the sense that life is best lived within clearly-seen rational limits.

Peyre: It's quite true. It has often been said that the greatest of all French qualities is architectural. They put it everywhere, even in their music, in Rameau and Debussy and so on, and it obviously is in La Fontaine. Each of the fables in itself is perfectly built. They are a triumph of what is perhaps the greatest of all the arts, the art of knowing what to omit and how to select. Goethe, who admired La Fontaine greatly, as he did many other French classics, said somewhere that the sense of limitation is the first quality by which a master is distinguished. In that sense, certainly, La Fontaine might rank with Raphael and Mozart among those who have known how to impose a framework upon life and, as it were, to submit to it.

Gurko: Well, can I at this point take La Fontaine down a peg or two from the rather exalted level of Mozart? Now the very sense of life's limitations, although it carries with it its own perfection, carries also with it, and certainly in La Fontaine's case, the danger of being actually limited in point of view. It's very difficult for us to read La Fontaine from start to finish without the feeling—although his view of life is genial, although his conceptions of human nature are well-rounded, although he sees the black and the white and the greys in between—that nevertheless he doesn't go very deeply into it. What is lacking in him is passion and fire and intensity, all of the things which we find, for example, in Mozart, even though perfectly controlled. I suppose that's why he's regarded by the French as a great classic writer, but operating in a minor form.

Bryson: I think Mr. Gurko has brought a little heretical romanticism into this discussion.

Gurko: I'm incurably romantic!

Peyre: I think Mr. Gurko is, and probably I am, too. I would rather like to be. But the fact is that today we are bound to judge La Fontaine with all our romantic prejudices and they don't quite apply historically. In his own time La Fontaine perceived many things which were deep and profound, but he thought that perhaps man wastes a great deal of time by trying to plumb those great abysses of mystery. He thought that it's far better for man to concentrate on what he can do around him, and help out by serving a limited cause efficiently and well.

Gurko: Yes, I see that very clearly. I'm only trying to suggest that that carries with it a certain price. It carries with it a certain dullness and limitation. Now, whatever we may say about Pascal, he is never dull. There are times when La Fontaine is dull. We read three or four of his fables at a time and we're about ready for a rest. I think that is characteristic not simply of the short form in which he

operates, but of his deliberately limited point of view. I think that La Fontaine himself was conscious of the price that he was paying, but it squared so perfectly with his own temperament that he was prepared, quite cheerfully, to pay in advance without any of the soul-searching and conscience-burning that so many of our contemporary writers are guilty of.

Bryson: But our contemporary writers in France are extremely fond of La Fontaine, are they not?

Peyre: Oh, yes! Valéry, Giraudoux, and Gide have been, and they find in him considerably more pep than you say. I will grant Mr. Gurko this: you don't find in La Fontaine what you find, say, in *Antony and Cleopatra* or in *Hamlet* or in *Macbeth*.

Bryson: Stick to the French, Mr. Peyre!

Peyre: Well, the French certainly have had a great many writers who are romantic and very profound and mysterious. But there is another side to the French temperament that is more original, because no other nation in Europe seems to have it to the same extent. That is a gift for doing the light thing seriously, as La Fontaine did, and very serious and grave things with a certain lightness and modesty. That is, I think, a very valuable lesson today, when so many of us take our anxiety and our anguish so tragically, and boast of it and display it. La Fontaine brings us back to what the French, and many foreign observers, like to call French sanity. Maybe there's more need of that today in the world than there is of high-flown romanticism.

Gurko: I wouldn't dispute you there, and I think one of the attractive things about La Fontaine is his wonderful lack of self-consciousness. We ourselves are incurably self-conscious. To find a writer who can deal with great and serious subjects, in whatever form, with a sense of detachment and geniality and naturalness is a remarkable thing. I think the attraction that La Fontaine exercises for us is the attraction of opposites; I'm quite certain that this is what carries many of the contemporary French writers back to him, not because he reminds them of themselves, but because he reminds them of the qualities which they feel so conspicuously lacking in themselves and which they long so passionately to acquire.

Peyre: Yes. Many of the modern French writers, as you know, have problems of a physiological and psychological kind; when they go back to La Fontaine they are gratified to find a man who didn't suffer from problems or pretend that he did. He just left his problems alone when he wrote and tried to be a perfect artist as far as it went.

Bryson: When you say "a perfect artist," Mr. Peyre, does a person who grew up in French culture, as you did—after all, those of us who approach it from another language can't ever get it quite the way it is to you—do *you* feel that he was a perfect artist?

Peyre: I would say yes. I think most French critics have agreed that he took a genre, the fable, which, as you know, is a very didactic genre and one that doesn't lend itself to greatness, and into it he poured everything—lyricism, personality, a great deal of poetry and mastery of words, a remarkable sense of story-telling perhaps unequalled in French literature, and a very rich sense of humor.

Bryson: And yet he took, as many classic writers have done, very

familiar material. After all, many of his fables are things that appear in all the languages of the world.

Peyre: That's what Virgil, of course, had done and Horace and so many other classics. According to the well-known motto, to borrow from one person is to plagiarize, but to take from many and to make it your own is to create.

Gurko: Or the variant on that phrase—that bad poets imitate, good poets steal.

Bryson: We call it research, you know!

Gurko: Speaking of the fable form, one notes a certain difference between La Fontaine's use of the fable and that of Aesop in ancient times or that, say, of our own Walt Disney. La Fontaine avoids the heavy, didactic moralizing of Aesop and at the same time he avoids that element of sweetness, one might almost say saccharinity, that has begun to creep into the cartoons of Walt Disney. In avoiding both the excesses of didacticism at one extreme and the excesses of sentimentality at the other, La Fontaine again suggests that element of sanity and balance which makes him the perfect classicist.

Bryson: Well, he had control over his material *and* his own time. Now let's turn to one of the most familiar, the fable of *The Grasshopper and the Ant*. Read it to us, Mr. Peyre.

Peyre: This is not, as you well know, the best of all the fables of La Fontaine . . .

Bryson: But we know it so well!

Peyre: And it's a very short and charming one:

LA CIGALE ET LA FOURMI

La Cigale, ayant chanté

Tout l'été,

Se trouva fort dépourvue

Quand la bise fut venue:

Pas un seul petit morceau

De mouche ou de vermisseau.

Elle alla crier famine

Chez la Fourmi sa voisine,

La priant de lui prêter

Quelque grain pour subsister

Jusqu'à la saison nouvelle.

Je vous paierai, lui dit-elle,

Avant l'ôût, foi d'animal,

Intérêt et principal.

La Fourmi n'est pas prêteuse:

C'est là son moindre défaut.

Que faisiez-vous au temps chaud?

Dit-elle à cette emprunteuse.

—Nuit et jour à tout venant

Je chantais, ne vous déplaîse.

—Vous chantiez? j'en suis fort aise:

Eh bien! dansez maintenant.

Bryson: I think there's a great deal of wit there, as well as humor

and sweetness and sensibility and understanding of the life of little creatures. That *foi d'animal*, for instance, that marvelous little phrase—a play on *foi de gentilhomme*.

Peyre: He has the art, more than any other French poet, of fitting the dialogue to the characters.

Bryson: Wit in that sense?

Peyre: Yes, that is witty. But, I would still use the word "humorous," because at the back of everything there is kindness and pity for humanity. That is why his appeal has been fairly general and not just limited, as the appeal of wit often is, to a small circle of society. There is a great contrast between the wit and irony of, say, Voltaire or some modern French writers, and the humor of La Fontaine, which goes way beyond wit.

Gurko: We somehow associate wit with the idea of artificiality, of intellectualizing, of consciously scoring points, and it's precisely that which is lacking in La Fontaine.

Bryson: To go back to a theme that both of you have spoken of: La Fontaine is constantly striking a blow for freedom, striking a blow against war. After all, Louis XIV was a pretty reckless conqueror in his day. Does this make La Fontaine in any real sense a precursor of the French Revolution?

Peyre: No. That would be far too much to contend, I think. La Fontaine is really a very great artist and a very rare combination. He's both a miracle of culture, a man who knew exactly what he was doing, why he was doing it, and how to do it, and also a man who, perhaps more than any other classic, has the qualities of freshness, spontaneity, and naturalness.

Gurko: Then it's his very avoidance of heavy philosophizing, of weighty social documentation, that makes him so attractive to contemporary readers and writers. It's his quality of accepting life on its own terms. But I wonder if we could say a word about the fascination of the fable itself? Particularly the animal fable, which, as we know, goes all the way back to the beginning of primitive man and occurs in every literature. It certainly occurs in our own, from Joel Chandler Harris with his Uncle Remus stories to James Thurber and his modern fables—and, of course, Walt Disney. In reading La Fontaine again one discovers the wonderful opportunity that a writer has when he talks of human beings in terms of animals, an opportunity to simplify human traits down to their essentials. Because, by their very definition, animals are much more limited and simple than human beings, they can serve as laboratories for human nature in a most wonderfully convenient way.

Bryson: They seem more simple!

Peyre: It is, of course, a wonderful device to show not only that men are animal in part of their nature, but also that they have got to learn from animals how they have become men—and try to be worthy of what a man is or should be.

Gurko: Yes, the moral comments at the end of the fables, which are generally filled with a kind of homespun wisdom, flatter us as readers because we recognize in them substantiation and support of what we have already discovered.

Bryson: In that little trick, La Fontaine shows his great artistry. Instead of flattering us, a lesser man might make us feel that he was being condescending—but La Fontaine is so perfect an artist that he can put the moral in and make us feel that we share his wisdom.

MARY WEBB

Precious Bane

(As broadcast July 10, 1955)

MARCHETTE CHUTE • CHAIM RAPHAEL • LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: I suppose Mary Webb's readers are few, but I should say that they were passionate. I find that people either think Mary Webb is one of the great neglected classics, or they think that she's a properly neglected bad author. But they can't say that she was commonplace.

Chute: No, I don't think they'd say she was commonplace. She was a very unusual, almost unique writer, and hers are the kind of books that you either love very much or don't care for at all. I love them.

Bryson: What is it in these books that catches and holds this devotion?

Chute: I think it's the creation of a world of her own, something you can enter and live in, and within that world a complete sense of reality.

Bryson: Provided you're *willing* to enter it?

Chute: You must be willing.

Raphael: I feel, particularly in *Precious Bane*, that there's an unusual sense of locality, of region—a feeling that the author and her characters *belong* to that particular part of the earth. This is a wonderful experience that you cannot find in a more conventional story.

Bryson: But, looking at the characters, isn't one a bit repelled by these people?

Chute: I don't think the characters are the most important thing in the story, although they're a very real part of it. By itself it's an extremely violent, almost melodramatic plot. It's the story of a brother and a sister on a very lonely farm. Both of them cursed. She's cursed with a harelip, which makes the local people think she's a witch, and he is cursed with what his sister calls a "greed for having."

Bryson: One with a physical curse and one with a moral curse. Is it typical of that kind of life—I suppose we have to ask Mr. Raphael to give us British testimony on this—that the physical curse makes people think there's a moral curse beyond it? Although this girl is so wonderful inside her disfigured body, they think she's evil because she has a harelip.

Chute: Well, of course, the village people feel that to love money

is a virtue, and no curse at all. Gideon, the brother, is obviously a man who is going to get on. It's just that he carried it to such violent extremes that he became inhuman.

Bryson: And yet we see the brother through the girl, Prudence Sarn.

Chute: Prudence tells the story; she loves him as she loves everyone—and forgives everyone.

Raphael: And you sense that, despite her disfigurement, she feels herself to be, and is felt by other people to be, a beautiful person. For one thing, she has a beautiful body and beautiful hair. It isn't, for example, like the harelip in *Tobacco Road*, where you get a revolting sense of disfigurement; it has more of a symbolic meaning here, it seems to me. It doesn't put you off from enjoyment of the book as a story.

Chute: I think Mary Webb felt that no natural thing was in itself wrong or ugly; it was the unnatural, the inhuman, the hard, and the cold that frightened her.

Bryson: And so it is the greed, the almost insane selfishness, the "desire for having" on the part of Gideon, the brother, that seems to her more dreadful than the girl's misfortune.

Chute: That's what precipitates all the violent action, all the horror and the deaths and the suicides.

Raphael: You feel that Prue Sarn loves nature and the region so much that nothing would have gone wrong if there hadn't been this evil in man, in her brother—whom she loves, incidentally, very much.

Bryson: And yet she succeeds in telling her own story here, even while she succeeds in showing the evil in her brother.

Chute: It's rather a remarkable achievement.

Bryson: It's also a remarkable depiction of a very subtle kind of character. But what's the machinery of this story? When we speak of violence, what are we talking of?

Chute: Well, the story in general describes the "precious bane" of the title—bane in the old English sense of destroyer. That sense of longing for position and money drives Gideon Sarn to put the wheat crop above everything else; he forces his mother and sister to slave on the land; in the end the wheat is set afire by the father of the girl he's going to marry. And he goes, in time, insane.

Bryson: His ambition leads him so far that when he's thwarted, life is impossible to him. Well, then, what happens to Prudence?

Chute: She, on the contrary, has worked out her curse in the reverse way: a charming man has fallen in love with her, and she ends up with a very happy life.

Bryson: In spite of some adventures along the way, such as being ducked in the pond as a witch.

Chute: Constant adventures.

Bryson: Is anybody else in this story important besides the brother and sister?

Chute: I would say Sarn Farm is the important element—the constant presence of the loneliness, of a sense of brooding evil, and, at the same time, of an almost religious feeling for nature.

Raphael: Yes, as in this passage: "It used to seem to me sometimes

as if Sarn was too old to be true. The woods and the farm and the church at the other end of the mere were all so old, as if they were in somebody's dream." That's the feeling you get all the way through the book—of the ancient place, the ancient family, and the ancient mere.

Bryson: But what Miss Chute said a moment ago seemed to me to suggest that the melodrama, if I can use that somewhat derogatory word, injected into this picture suggests that nature is glorious *and* terrible at the same time.

Raphael: Prue Sarn has a wonderful sense of the beauty of nature. She never suggests that Providence is bad or is sporting with one, as in the Hardy stories; rather, it's a feeling that if man goes wrong, he runs the risk of throwing all this glory away. Although the story is melodramatic and has terrible things in it, deaths and murders and everything else, yet at no point does she seem to feel that there's any evil around her except where man goes wrong.

Bryson: Man is violent.

Raphael: It's a religious point of view: man must conquer the violence in himself.

Bryson: Do you know Shropshire, Mr. Raphael?

Raphael: I do indeed, although when one talks about regionalism in English literature, one has to be very precise as to which street or which village one is talking about. Any reader of this book feels the tremendous absorption with Shropshire, or rather with South Shropshire, which is the area where Mary Webb spent much of her life. Shropshire is very close to Wales, and anyone reading this, I think, does feel the echo of Wales—of the fairies, the harps, the legends.

Bryson: But you can't make me think that there's no other romanticism in the British nature—that they get it all out of Cornwall and Wales!

Raphael: I think we do feel, in England, that each little area, each county and each part of a county, has its own character. Shropshire, as we know from another Shropshire man, Housman, has a special quality. The Shropshire people feel that they wouldn't like to be confused with Wales or Cheshire or Staffordshire or Worcester or any of the adjoining counties, each of which has its own character.

Chute: In Mary Webb's case, particularly, she was striking her roots very deep in the past; she went around and talked to people who remembered the old days and the old ways. I'm working now on the seventeenth century, and I noticed a great many things in this book that would seem natural in the seventeenth, even though she's writing about the early nineteenth.

Bryson: Yes, but isn't it true that in this particular kind of life the old persists in an extraordinary way?

Chute: Yes, the roots are very deep.

Raphael: Well, in her introduction to *Precious Bane* Mary Webb writes: "When antique things are also country things, they are easier to write about, for there is a permanence, a continuity in country life which makes the lapse of centuries seem of little moment." The feeling you get is that it has always been like that.

Bryson: I'm beginning to suspect that you like the book because of this sense of place, this poetic depiction of place.

Raphael: I do, yes. It's a wonderful illustration of something that a number of writers and artists are beginning to express in England—how a place affects one as a human being. I'm thinking of Jacquetta Hawkes' book, *A Land*, in which you get a wonderful feeling that you've always been there and everything in front of you is part of you; or of a sculptor like Henry Moore, who gives you the same feeling.

Bryson: To us, in this country, I think that sort of thing is more familiar in Hardy than it is in any other English writer. In a very curious sense this book seems to me to be a reversal of Hardy's method. In Hardy you get the feeling that nature is a kind of brooding presence in which there is evil. And here, as both of you say, these people are cursed because they don't get out of nature the glory and the beauty that are there. Prudence does, but her brother doesn't.

Chute: I think it's Mrs. Webb's religious sense rather than her nature sense that controls the plot.

Bryson: How do you mean that?

Chute: The sense of freedom and loving and giving, which to Mrs. Webb is the important thing, compared with the coldness and hardness of holding back, which the brother typifies.

Bryson: But is that because the sister, having her curse in herself, so to speak, has a deeper pity, a deeper sense of the tragedy of things, than her brother?

Chute: I think in all probability that Prue Sarn is, in a way, Mary Webb herself. In all her books you find the same quality—that enormous love for all things and pity for all things.

Bryson: Mary Webb herself must have been a very extraordinary person. She was a schoolmaster's daughter, wasn't she?

Chute: Yes, and a schoolmaster's wife.

Bryson: Being a schoolmaster in a village in Shropshire wouldn't be exactly a remunerative position, would it?

Raphael: No, but it would be enough to live on.

Bryson: You know the legend about Mary Webb—that she was a neglected genius who lived in polite but rather oppressive poverty most of her life, that she struggled for recognition, and so on.

Raphael: She did, yes. Although her works received some acclaim, even as early as 1917 when the first ones came out, she wasn't at all well known until Stanley Baldwin, who was then Prime Minister of England, discovered her. This is a unique case, as far as I know, in which a writer's reputation was established in the public mind by a letter from 10 Downing Street.

Bryson: I think there's only one parallel to it and that's when Edwin Arlington Robinson, in this country, was more or less established as a poet by Theodore Roosevelt's excitement about him. It doesn't often happen that a politician makes a literary reputation. It was too late as far as Mary Webb was concerned.

Raphael: It was almost too late. Baldwin got *Precious Bane*, the book we're talking about, as a Christmas present in 1926, two years after it was published. He was so moved—being himself a country man, just across the border from Shropshire—that he wrote her a note, which she was very glad to receive. She died the following year, but he went on mentioning her in speeches; he was really taken by her.

Bryson: What I'm puzzled by is the sort of implied rejection by you, Mr. Raphael, and I think not quite so much by Miss Chute, of the necessity for violence in the lives of these people. Mrs. Webb seems to have been convinced when she wrote *Precious Bane*—and her other books, too—that in these little villages people must be as these people were: intense, violent, deeply stirred by their own rather trivial fate.

Raphael: I accept a lot of the violence and melodrama in her writing as true, but I don't accept all of it as necessary. But when one surrenders, as Miss Chute says, to this book, one feels that this is the way this particular part of the world is being moved at this particular time.

Bryson: Yes, but my question is: is this Mary Webb's world, or is it Shropshire?

Raphael: I think it's a mixture. It's an evocation of Shropshire as seen through Mary Webb's eyes. Whether it was ever like that—she writes about a period a hundred years before her time—is irrelevant. She felt it that way and made it ring true on her own terms. The sense of drama is no more surprising than, say, the drama in *Wuthering Heights*. It's very similar except for the difference in region. One is mysterious and the other is wild.

Chute: I think that in all of Mary Webb's work there's a kind of persistent intensity, a kind of heightening of emotion. She was the sort of woman who would go out the last thing at night and kneel down in the white clover to see what had happened to it since sundown.

Raphael: That's reflected in her minute descriptions of nature; once she starts describing it, she goes on and on and can't stop. Think of that moment when the corn ricks are afire, and everything they've worked for and hoped for is at stake. Prue runs out with all the others, but then she plunges into a rhapsodic description of the joys of sowing and of reaping. It goes on for more than a page. It's all authentic to her, she feels it, she describes it lovingly—but you wonder that she can spend her time doing that in the middle of this great drama.

Chute: But I think that gives you some sense of the love of the grain, of how much had gone into it.

Bryson: I think you have to forgive certain authors of even greater stature than Mary Webb that sort of thing, don't you? You can go right back to Homer for the injection of a piece of description at the very moment of greatest dramatic intensity.

Raphael: I wasn't objecting to it; rather, I was quoting it as an example of how Mary Webb is able to enter into every detail of country life. And I was thinking of the way she'll describe a thing of nature, and then read some meaning into it. There's a passage here which I'd like to read, not an important passage, but simply this: "With that, he swept the scythe through the grass, thinnish and full of ox-eye daisies, and sighing with a dry sound. And because the grass was so thin, you could watch the scythe, like a flash of steely light, through the standing crop before the swath fell. And it seems to me now that it was like the deathly will of God, which is ever waiting behind us till the hour comes to mow us down . . ."

Bryson: Is this the religious sense that you were talking about, Miss Chute?

Chute: Yes, I would think so. There is in one of her essays, for instance, a long analysis of the Cross as it appears in various flower forms. I doubt that she could distinguish in her mind between the two strands; they belonged together.

Bryson: What I'm puzzled by is, I suppose, a psychological question—whether it's possible to have this intense feeling for nature, to give nature so much symbolic meaning, without also being emotionally akin to people of a violent nature. Can you separate the melodrama in this book from the intensity of the nature scenes?

Raphael: Well, there's one thing that might be a test of how she does it: the great drama of the book lies in the fact that all the energy of the Sarns has gone into producing this great crop of grain which is to take them out of their poverty—and then it's all burned up. Now there are two ways in which it could be burned up: it could have been struck by lightning during a thunderstorm . . .

Bryson: An accident.

Raphael: That's probably the way it would have been in Hardy.

Bryson: Yes, but Hardy would have made that accident an intentional act of God!

Raphael: In this case it's Beguildy, the wizard, who is aroused because his daughter Jancis has become the love of Gideon, who sets the ricks on fire deliberately—as simple a device as that. So it isn't nature. Even there Mrs. Webb never lets nature take a hand. It's simply that man can be sinful and spoil the whole bounty and goodness of nature.

Chute: But I think also there's a very slight theme of witchcraft, because part of Beguildy's hatred goes back to Gideon's father. And Gideon, with an old ceremony called "sin eating," has taken on the sins of his father as well as his own. There's a constant streak of the supernatural.

Bryson: Which, of course, gives the meaning to the charge against Prudence of being a witch; witchcraft and magic pervade the behavior of all these people, all the time.

Chute: Yes, but there's one other thing that I think should be said in fairness to Mary Webb: she has a streak of humor, which comes out very charmingly.

Bryson: Never condescendingly, though.

Raphael: No, I think she loves the people around her. One of the jolliest scenes is the trip to market, which as we know is a very direct reflection of Mary Webb's own life. When her husband was a schoolmaster they didn't have much money, apparently; they grew some flowers and fruit and went to Shrewsbury market once a week where she stood in the stall and sold her crops like anybody else. This was probably the closest she got, personally, to the country folk about whom she was writing. She, after all, was not one of them; she was a literary person. And there's a very nice passage in which she describes the market—the butcher still at his door, shouting his meat and holding up a long, shining knife, "enough to make you think the French were coming"; a woman selling hot potatoes; a potter breaking a dish

every now and then to get the people to come along. And it's a very jolly, cheerful scene—a bit unlike the rest of the book.

Chute: Even in her nature descriptions she holds to the ordinary and the actual. There's a constant pulling back to the ordinary and the familiar all through it.

Bryson: Do you mean pulling away from the mystical and the symbolic?

Chute: From the extremely intense, rather exalted . . .

Bryson: Her own sense of humor keeps her from going too far?

Chute: I would say so, yes.

Raphael: Sometimes the legends themselves help you, don't they? When Gideon, who's the strong, silent hero—or villain—of the book takes over the place, he invokes the spirit of the rooks, so to speak. He can't take over—this is an old legend—without going and asking the rooks if they accept him. He appeals to them; there's a great cawing, they come down, and he's pleased that they have accepted him as master.

Bryson: I wonder if we aren't being a little unfair to this book in not conveying, not admitting, the triumphant sense at the end when this delicate, sensitive, poetic creature Prudence overcomes her curse by finding a very genuine and very deep love? This man can see what she really is—what you've known all the time as you read her story.

Chute: You might almost call the book a parable of the triumph of love—of a loveless man and how he is destroyed, and of a woman with a great capacity for love and how she's exalted.

Bryson: In spite of the obstacle of her curse.

Chute: It was only a physical thing.

Bryson: Yes, but it takes a great writer, after she's made the physical thing very real, to show you how it can be swept away.

Chute: But I was thinking that a physical defect, in the scheme of human values, is so unimportant compared with the other sort.

Bryson: But is it to these people? These farmers and villagers—to them a physical curse meant that she was also cursed morally.

Chute: They were frightened, and when you're frightened you never behave very well.

Raphael: Only every now and then do you feel that. I don't think you're aware of this curse of the harelip as much as Prudence says. "Could I help it," her mother will cry, "if the hare crossed my path?" And someone will have a conversation with Prue, a very nice, pleasant conversation, and end up by saying, "What a pity it is you are so cursed!" But it doesn't ever make you lose for a moment the notion that it's going to come out all right, because from the very beginning you're told that she had found love. The whole book is, in a sense, a flashback to this story of how she struggled before she found it. So it is a love story and a very simple one.

Bryson: A very deep and powerful love story. As a matter of fact, it's a love story as much as anything else, in spite of its being the story of two curses.

Chute: It is definitely a love story. And, of course, nature is also part of the love story, because it's Mary Webb's great love affair with nature.

Bryson: How much is she expressing herself in Prudence?

Chute: In regard to her feeling for nature, I would say that Prudence is almost completely Mary Webb.

Raphael: And while you call it "a love affair with nature," I do think it's rather different. I think that she wanted to extol the power of human love. The feeling for nature is the losing of one's self in nature—in the beauty and bounty and glory of nature.

Chute: What's needed is a kind of a willing entry into the world of Mary Webb's mind and heart, if the reader will do it. I think it's a very remarkable and rewarding experience.

Bryson: So I suppose, Miss Chute, if we say that someone ought to go and read this, we ought to give warning that you shouldn't enter her world unless you go willingly.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

Shorter Lyrics

(As broadcast July 17, 1955)

WALTER COHEN

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ANNE FREMANTLE

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LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: When one rereads the shorter lyrics of Shelley, as I've recently done, I think one is struck by the fact that he so seldom reaches the peak of his capacity, although when he does he is almost unsurpassable. And it's mostly in his nature poems that he shows his greatest strength and greatest beauty.

Fremantle: I think the most exciting thing about Shelley's nature poems is the way in which they differ from those of other English nature poets. After all, in England we have rather a tradition of nature poets. During the eighteenth century mountains were out of fashion—they were just tedious things to get over in a stagecoach—until you encounter Thomas Gray, the first English poet who really looked at nature and liked it. Then you come to Wordsworth, who used nature as an *ersatz* for the godhead he found theologically difficult. And then you come to Shelley, who had an entirely different view of nature.

Cohen: He had a different view even from his contemporary and friend, Lord Byron.

Fremantle: Or from Keats.

Cohen: Or from Keats, yes. But I think chiefly of Byron in connection with Shelley because of their intimacy. For Byron, nature was the refuge of a heart that had been sated with worldliness.

Bryson: The refuge—and also the stage-manager. Byron liked to see nature work out in storms and lightning the drama that he thought was going on in his own soul.

Cohen: Byron, of course, liked to give direction to nature; he

urged the ocean to roll, and so on. For Shelley, nature is something else altogether.

Fremantle: But I think that Shelley also regarded nature as entirely symbolic of what went on inside him. You remember that when he and Byron were out on a lake in a thunderstorm—he was very young, he was only nineteen . . .

Bryson: He was *never* anything but very young, Miss Fremantle.

Fremantle: That's right; we forget how young they were.

Cohen: It's the fact that Shelley was very young that is in large part his essential attraction for us: he is the youth in all of us. Shelley and his ideas represent the generous enthusiasms that everyone who's ever been young passes through.

Fremantle: But also, I think, the silly mistakes and the attitudinizing. I think a lot of Shelley's affection for nature—in spite of the fact that it came out in wonderful poetry—was attitudinizing. The skylark he and Mary listened to was a bird they heard in the evening in Pisa.

Cohen: Yes, but that's irrelevant.

Bryson: It wasn't a skylark, but that doesn't matter.

Cohen: No, and Shelley himself, at the very beginning, gives you the clue to his attitude: "Hail to thee, blithe Spirit/bird thou never wert . . ."

Fremantle: He certainly wasn't!

Cohen: . . . And then he enters into his marvelous dream of imagery. Shelley, of course, is the most imaginative, in the sense of image-creating, of the English poets; he's equal to Shakespeare in that respect.

Bryson: Before you build on that, can we go back to what Miss Fremantle said about his using nature symbolically? You don't mean the same thing that I do when I say that Byron looked at nature as his own stage-manager.

Fremantle: No. Byron was an English lord and he looked on nature as something that more or less belonged to him; it was part of his estate. Shelley was only a gentleman, and in his relations with Byron he never forgot it. That's one of the amusing things about that relationship. But I think he regarded nature as something that he had grown up with and had only discovered later, as he discovered books. He was nineteen years old, he was staying at the most beautiful place he had ever seen, in Wales, and he said: "This is the most beautiful scenery you can imagine, but it's all very dull, stale, and flat; in fact, it's very boring."

Cohen: Aren't you, perhaps, over-personalizing what really was Shelley's attitude towards nature? To begin with, I don't agree with you that Shelley discovered nature late. I think there is good evidence, both in his own words and in the spirit that his poems reflect, that nature was his close companion even when he was at school. For him nature is really something more than the medium through which he expresses his emotions. Nature is that elemental creatrix to which man is joined, and from which man has somehow become alienated. It is as though we have divorced ourselves from nature. You remember that after Prometheus has dethroned Zeus, it is to Asia—the personification

of nature—that he returns. The mind of man and the personification of nature at last come together again, after Zeus has been sent into discard.

Fremantle: Yes, but on the other hand, when Shelley was a small boy, his idea of nature was a small boy's attitude toward what he could use in it. He loved setting fire to things; he was practically a pyromaniac.

Cohen: He was a natural philosopher in search of truth.

Fremantle: He set fire to a barn once because he wanted to make a small hell of his own.

Cohen: He raised plenty of it later.

Bryson: Yes, when he got older he had even better ways of making life a hell for himself and everybody else.

Fremantle: But I think his attitude toward nature was that of a very normal English child. If you remember the early poem on the cat, the five stanzas on the poor little cat who couldn't catch a rat; it's very sympathetic and nice, but it isn't anything that links up with Wordsworth's pantheism or even with the early feeling of someone like Keats, who was shut up in a city and loved nature because it was an escape.

Bryson: What made the difference? Why was it that when he was nineteen—which is, after all, pretty far along in the life of a man who died at twenty-nine—why was it that he suddenly discovered nature? Was it because he suddenly discovered love?

Fremantle: Yes, I think so. I think that when he first fell in love, as many people do, he saw things completely differently. It was not until after his marriage, until after Harriet, that he began to write nature poems or to use nature symbolically.

Cohen: It was scarcely until after his marriage that he began to write poetry *at all*, Miss Fremantle!

Fremantle: Oh, Mr. Cohen, he wrote chunks of it; at Eton he wrote four volumes, for one of which he got forty pounds. They weren't all his own; one was plagiarized, you remember.

Cohen: But these are not the poems that we associate with him. His first major poem was *Queen Mab*, which was dedicated to his wife.

Bryson: Well, he couldn't grow up much before nineteen.

Fremantle: Yet he did publish very early.

Cohen: Is Shelley's concern with nature really the largest element in his poetry—the most considerable, the one that has the most effect on his mind? In *Queen Mab* he's the revolutionist, the man who is remaking the world. He borrowed from Godwin, who later became his father-in-law, the philosophy that never deserted him to the day he died: the philosophy that man is good and nature is good, but that there's been an unfortunate divergence; somehow priests, kings, and tyrants have come between them, and man has been deflected from his natural course. Now isn't that really a larger element in his poetry than his feeling for nature?

Fremantle: I don't think larger, because I think that he used nature as he used his ideas . . .

Cohen: He borrowed his imagery from nature.

Fremantle: I know, but he used both symbolically. I think that the things he really cared about were things like fire and water; if you count up the references to both fire and water in his poems, the number is astonishing.

Bryson: It's very curious that he should have been obsessed with fire and water. What do you mean by that? Is it the childish response to great elemental things, or do you mean something much more subtle—that he was a sort of Eleatic philosopher without knowing it?

Fremantle: He had a great feeling for Lucretius, you remember. Take the lines, "I scarcely know how beautiful fire is; each flame of it is as a precious stone, dissolved in ever-moving light." That sort of simile occurs all the time, and I think it is a relic of Lucretius, or something responding to Lucretius in himself.

Bryson: Or is it very close to the inner revolutionary spirit of the man?

Fremantle: Would water be?

Bryson: Yes, water is one of the most destructive elements.

Cohen: Water has a number of significances. We remember, of course, that in every novel of George Meredith's, at some crucial moment, the scene is always set against a background of water; that marvelous love scene in *Richard Feverel* is played against the water.

Bryson: Meredith is likely to use water in a beneficent way, but Shelley seems to have loved water and to have died in it . . .

Cohen: Isn't it curious? His first wife, Harriet Westbrook, to whom he was married for a few years and then left when he eloped with Mary Wollstonecraft, drowned herself. Shelley himself drowned in the Gulf of Spezia.

Fremantle: All his life he lived near water. He had an extraordinary feeling for it; he had to have a house near it—even his English houses were always near water.

Cohen: Yes, and you remember in that philosophic dialogue between him and Lord Byron—*Julian and Maddalo* it's called—Shelley mentions something about his inability to swim. It's remarked that "if you can't swim, stay away from the water." It had a fatal attraction for him.

Bryson: Well, what are you two people getting at now?

Cohen: I think that in a way we're getting too far.

Bryson: Is there some deep symbolism in Shelley that has never quite been brought to light? The man was this extraordinary combination: he loved nature as a source of symbols, as a source of images, but he also was a revolutionary, he wanted to remake the world; and what appealed to him in nature was far more deeply destructive than what appealed to Byron.

Fremantle: Shelley thought he was using nature as a symbol, but actually you don't use nature, nature uses you. Everything in Shelley's life was productive of tremendously symbolic meaning. No revolution has happened since his time without quoting Shelley—he's one of the great revolutionaries of all times—and that is the fire he lit; and the water he drowned in is the water he loved to live by, you see. I mean that nature, so to speak, gave as much as she got.

Bryson: And when he says that poets are the unacknowledged

law-givers to the world, he means that they make laws for a new world, doesn't he?

Fremantle: I think so.

Cohen: They make laws for the world which at the moment of their expression seems to be coming into being. Shelley had a curious feeling that at the moment when things are changing, at the moment when the new is being born from the old, it's then that the poet is called forth. There's some secret connection between the poet's expression and change or movement in the world. Of course, one of the sad things about Shelley's own life, and yet one of the things that makes him endearing, is that he made laws for a world which has never yet come into being—a world which remains in permanent antithesis to this one.

Fremantle: And everything he actually did achieve, whether in his relations with other human beings or with society, fell to pieces in his hand like a housemaid's teacup. No one made more of a mess of his human relationships. Every time he went to Ireland to help the Irish revolutionaries, he succeeded only in getting them longer jail sentences. Everything he did turned to ashes.

Cohen: And yet the failure of all that, just like the corpse of Adonais, turns into something much more splendid. Because it seems to me that there are two strong and characteristic notes in Shelley: one is his striving toward the new world that will come about when Godwin's theories are once put into practice; the other is his sad, his terribly sad, sense that somehow he cannot bring that world about, nor will anyone ever. From that come all of his wonderful personal lyrics, the nature lyrics as well as the others.

Fremantle: But don't you think that perhaps Taine was right when he said that Shelley was endowed with all the gifts of heart, mind, birth, and fortune, and that he deliberately ruined his life by carrying into his behavior the enthusiastic imagination he should have reserved for his poetry?

Cohen: No man *deliberately* ruins his life, Miss Fremantle. He does it in an excess of fine enthusiasm; he's not driving toward ruin, he's driving toward some visionary hope and, unfortunately, the circumstances of life, which are not guided by visionary hopes for the most part, are in conflict with his direction.

Bryson: I think Taine is only on the surface of it, in a way, although what he says is quite true. I suspect—and it seems to me that you people have given me reason for deepening my suspicion—that the reason why Shelley never could look forward to the realization of his own ideals, as a true revolutionary, is because it was only the destructive side of it that he really had any deep sympathy with.

Fremantle: That's a very interesting point, and I think that is the thing about Shelley: he was primarily a destroyer.

Bryson: He wanted to destroy things as they were. Perhaps we ought to go further and say that the poet can only think of the magnificent destruction of what is evil—it's not for the poet to build the future.

Cohen: I don't have that feeling at all. There's something to substantiate it, certainly, in the fact that Shelley didn't lay out a blue-

print of the world that he wanted. His greatest poem, the one that I regard as greatest—*Prometheus Unbound*—breaks in the middle. After Zeus has been sent down to endless oblivion and Prometheus is free, Prometheus, the mind of man, asks "what is the earthly paradise that is going to succeed?" Shelley doesn't tell us, because, as you say, he seems to have no precise idea. But what he does do is this: he gives us, after the destruction of Zeus, two acts of matchless lyric poetry. Through that he gives us a feeling of the kind of world that will succeed; he doesn't give an explicit blueprint of it, but we have a sense of the spirit that will prevail in it. Shelley can arouse in us, as no other poet can, through the music of his verse a sense of his meaning. In other poets—Swinburne, for instance, or Tennyson—meaning reinforces music. In Shelley, music is the meaning.

Bryson: That is your true poet.

Cohen: Yes; he approaches the position, I think, that Walter Pater speaks about when he says that all art must attain the condition of music. The communication is in the music, and it's impossible to paraphrase it.

Fremantle: Well, Mr. Cohen, I don't know that I would agree with you. I think, for instance, that in *Adonais*—which to me is his greatest poem, greater than even *Prometheus* . . .

Cohen: Perhaps I class it above *Adonais* because it's longer.

Fremantle: So is *Queen Mab*. I think in *Adonais* that you're always struck, in actual fact, by the way he treated Keats until he was dead, and then the way that he writes about him. When Keats was alive Shelley was awfully patronizing, advised him not to publish just yet, didn't regard him too highly, and so on—in fact, he probably contributed somewhat to the general feeling of disillusionment that Keats had. Then, when the man's safely dead, you have this tremendous poem, probably one of the greatest eulogies ever written.

Cohen: I don't have that sense, Miss Fremantle. After all, John Keats was not Keats until he had died. To imply that Shelley was perhaps ungenerous in his treatment of Keats seems to me unfair and unwarranted. After all, in the company of poets that he pictures coming to mourn the dead *Adonais*, Shelley places himself last, even behind Leigh Hunt; Lord Byron precedes him. Shelley invited Keats to join him in Italy.

Fremantle: Yes, that's true, and Keats refused because he was afraid of Shelley's influence. That's a very interesting point, how these three men affected each other: Shelley himself was rather afraid to write—*couldn't* write—when Byron was about, and yet a great many of his best poems have been influenced by Byron. And, certainly, I think that the little sense of humor Shelley ever had he derived from Byron. He's very funny in *Peter Barrow*, for instance, which I think he got largely from association with Byron. Keats also was afraid of Shelley and of Shelley's influence on him. These men interreacted upon each other, these great poets.

Bryson: I don't think we should forget 150 years of history, or what England was like at the turn of the century. As you yourself said, Byron was a lord—and Shelley, who was only a rich gentleman, looked up to Byron. Keats was a poor tradesman's son, and Shelley

expected Keats to look up to him. And although Shelley was a revolutionary, he was, after all, only a boy.

Cohen: A boy who was brought up with the idea that class differences went right to the soul.

Fremantle: And he did feel them. He was a very sensitive man, and he wanted to help the poor; he was wonderful—he'd empty his pockets, he'd give away everything he had, when he had nothing. I grant you, he had the most marvelously generous nature. But still, he couldn't stand the smell. I mean, he was sensitive enough to dislike them personally, wasn't he?

Cohen: Yes, and that is relevant or irrelevant. Certainly he did what he could for them, as you say, in Ireland; he did what he could for them in Wales.

Fremantle: And always making their condition worse!

Cohen: Yes, but not by deliberate intent.

Bryson: But he was the true revolutionary, because he was a condescending superior. Who is the true revolutionary, if not that?

Cohen: I shouldn't say, though, that he respected Byron any the more for Byron's being a lord. That seems to me somewhat to contradict the sense that I have of Shelley, the sense that Shelley gives of himself. I think Shelley would have been very happy to see every kind of distinction of that sort disappear. We often hear it as a criticism that Shelley is difficult to read. Actually, he's one of the simplest of poets to read because his ideas are so few. He's always talking about the wrongs that tyranny inflict, or the blessings that will follow after the disappearance of tyranny, or his own sadness because he falls upon the thorns of life. What is difficult in Shelley is that he is so extraordinarily rich in imagery that he tires the mind of the reader.

Fremantle: To get back to the nature poems, which I think are much greater than any of the long political poems: there he is able to incorporate, in verse, imagery that he can manage. I think the trouble with a poem like *Prometheus*, if you read it again, is that the ideas are now rather old hat. We feel that they are not as valid as they were; therefore, the poetry isn't as valid. Whereas nature is as valid as ever she was.

Cohen: Old ideas? Excuse me! Old ideas and still *new* ideas, still untried ideas. Shelley had a horror of history. He couldn't bear to read history. For him it was nothing but a record of crime and pollution and tyranny. And aren't we still under the burden of that history?

Fremantle: You mean his own?

Cohen: No, universal history. He couldn't bear to read universal history. There's that wonderful legend that before a soul could cross to the Isles of the Blessed it must go through the waters of Lethe, the river of forgetfulness, until the past is forgotten. And that, of course, is a thought which Shelley develops in the last chorus of *Hellas*: as long as we carry the old world with us, we'll never attain the new one. That's still a new idea. It's not old hat.

Fremantle: But he had a great feeling for individual people in history. No one was more influenced by, as we just said, Lucretius or by Plato or even by Condorcet.

Bryson: Mr. Cohen, I'm sure, didn't mean to indicate that because he thought we should go through the waters of Lethe everything in the past was to be thrown overboard—because he was a thorough Platonist and, as you say, a thorough Lucretian. But he thought the crimes of the past ought to be forgotten so that one wouldn't commit them again.

Cohen: The boundaries of the past, the erected superstitions of the past. Again I must come back to *Prometheus*, because it seems to me to contain implicit in itself everything that is written larger through Shelley's poetry as a whole. What has happened in *Prometheus*? Prometheus is the mind of man; the mind of man has delegated its natural power, the power that can make the world happy and fortunate and blessed, to something called Jove or Jupiter, a creation of its own. This Jupiter has become a tyrant. Until the human mind can get rid of this tyrant—and, of course, he represents all gods and all authority in all times, all institutions—until we can get rid of the weight of those and reassert the power of the human mind, until the mind can act from day to day with the same strength that it has acted in creating these institutions, we're doomed to unhappiness.

Fremantle: And yet, what he really asked was that the West Wind should make him fly. He wanted to be something that was really non-political, almost non-human. He asked in the lovely ode *To Night*, as you suggest, for forgetfulness:

*When I arose and saw the dawn,
I sighed for thee . . .*

For sleep—but death came, and he refused death:

—*And I replied,*

No, not thee!

What he wants is sleep and forgetfulness. He almost identifies himself with the West Wind.

Cohen: "Be thou me, impetuous one"—yes. And yet, what is the message that he wants the West Wind to deliver through him? "If winter comes, can spring be far behind?" If we are in this dark and dreadful desolation which is the world, is it possible that the newer world, the ideal world, the free world that Shelley envisions, is going to linger behind it forever? Unfortunately, it did linger—and it's to that lingering that we owe his wonderful personal lyrics.

Fremantle: Just before he died, do you remember, he wanted Trelawney to teach him to swim. They went to a pool and Trelawney told him to jump in, and he jumped in with his clothes on and stayed at the bottom. They became frightened, and finally they pulled him up just in time, and he said very quietly: "I always find the bottom of the well. They say truth lies there. In another minute I should have found it, and you would have found the empty shell. It is an easy way of getting rid of the body." I think that what he really wanted, always, was a kind of almost pantheistic annihilation, an identification with nature.

Cohen: Certainly he wanted to restore the original union between man and nature, the union that had been disrupted by something deliberate on man's part.

Bryson: But it was nature, it seems to me, that in Shelley was

the great destroyer. It was a kind of deep, spiritual sympathy with whatever in nature gets rid of what is evil, plus the hope that what comes after will be better. And he had that hope. That's where the ineffability—that word they're always applying to Shelley—comes in. He was ineffable because his ideas, these magnificent abstractions built into touching lyrics, are a kind of justification for his joy in destroying the evil in the world.

Cohen: And despite his sense that he will never achieve it, it's because he is such a constant and earnest asserter of the hope that he means so much to us.

Fremantle: But I think Mr. Bryson has the last word about the destruction, because, after all, the line we all remember best is "Life, like a dome of many-colored glass, stains the white radiance of eternity." Life itself is a destructive thing, something that spoils.

Cohen: Yes. But the effect of the stain, of course, is sometimes towards happiness, sometimes towards grief (even then it can be transmuted). He speaks of poets and he says: "Most unfortunate men are cradled into poetry by wrong. They learn in suffering what they teach in song."

Fremantle: I think there's no question that Shelley suffered.

Bryson: Suffered—and, of course, whether or not his suffering came through his own fault is unimportant. After all, when a man is as great a poet as Shelley was at his greatest, I suppose it really doesn't make very much difference what the poetry came out of. It's there, and we can take it for what it is.

THE INSECT WORLD OF J. HENRI FABRE

Edited by Edwin Way Teale

(As broadcast July 24, 1955)

WILLY LEY

• EDWIN WAY TEALE

• LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: I always think of Fabre as primarily a writer, because he was not only the "Homer of the insects" but a pretty good Homer on his own account, if one considers the endless fascination of his work. But I've never given much thought to the question of whether or not his scientific value is on a par with his literary value.

Teale: Fabre was essentially an observer and an experimenter with living insects, and that was his realm in science.

Bryson: But wasn't he more or less the founder of experimental biology in our time?

Teale: Yes, he was. Previously, scientists had been mainly concerned with the naming of insects. There are so many insects that just

naming them took so long that they didn't get around to studying the creatures they had named. It was Fabre who began the great study of trying to find out what the insects they had named were like.

Bryson: They were still in the Garden of Eden phase of the insect world?

Ley: More or less. You have in every science three stages. The first is *what*: what exists? It is answered by the accumulation of information. The second is *how*: how do things happen, how does this or that take place? It requires the sorting of information. The third is the working hypothesis, the theory, which may be condensed into the word *why*: why does this happen? Now Fabre belongs somewhere between the first and the second of these stages.

Bryson: He was an observer. I think he's been called an incomparable observer—I don't know who said it.

Ley: It was Darwin himself.

Bryson: Well, that's pretty good authority, isn't it? Fabre's observation amounted to genius, and he spent ninety-two laborious years at it. Is there any way of explaining how a little French school teacher, living in poverty and in the most arid and difficult part of France, happened to devote his entire life to the study of the insect world? He had no ancestry or education that explains it.

Teale: No, he didn't know his ancestors beyond his grandparents, and there is nothing in his heredity that accounts for it. His mother couldn't read or write at all, and his father could read only the simplest words. He came from peasant stock. They had always lived out in the country in very circumscribed conditions. I believe it was St. Augustine who said "I fell upon a certain book"—and Fabre, when he became a teacher, spent his first month's salary for an illustrated book of insects. It opened up the world. He says in one of his delightful little asides that, as he turned the pages for the thousandth time, a voice spoke to him and said "You, too, will be one of the historians of the insects."

Bryson: I didn't mean to suggest that a man of peasant stock, a little country schoolteacher, might not have been a great genius—nothing like that. But it is a question of why he should have turned to this particular line.

Ley: When he read this book that Mr. Teale mentioned, his interest, his fascination with insects, was already fixed. This book was just a guide along a road he was already traveling. I may add that there were very few books on insects that he *could* have read. I myself know of only three which are older than those by Fabre himself. He really built the foundation of what you might call "living entomology" with those ten enormous volumes that he labored on for the better part of his life. The last volume didn't come out until 1907.

Teale: Twenty-eight years after the first one.

Bryson: But the man had been writing for a great many years before he started these volumes, because, after all, he was born in 1823. When we say that there was not much before Fabre, the fact that he died after the beginning of the first World War makes us forget that he was born very early in the nineteenth century.

Ley: Right after the death of Napoleon, to be precise.

Teale: Two years after it. But you have to remember that Fabre did a great deal of writing before he started his great work on insects. It was the year that he went to his *harmas* in the south of France. When he was fifty-five years old he had finally saved up enough money to buy these two-and-a-half acres of stony, pebbly, thistly ground that nobody wanted. It was worth nothing—but to him it was Eden. Well, it was the very year when he was fifty-five years old and bought his *harmas* that he published the first volume of his ten-volume series. He had long been writing potboilers, popular scientific books on astronomy and botany and things like that, to support himself after he had been dismissed from the *lycée* of Avignon.

Bryson: Although his job as a teacher at Avignon only paid him—what was it?—about three hundred dollars . . .

Teale: Three hundred and twenty dollars a year.

Bryson: Even in the middle of the nineteenth century that wasn't much for a man who had five kids to take care of. I suppose, in a sense, it was a blessing that he lost his job as a teacher, wasn't it?

Teale: It was. It gave him a chance to do the things that he had always wanted to do.

Ley: Well, it certainly developed his style as a writer. Writing those potboilers made him into a writer. It is very interesting that I read Jean Henri Fabre first in German translation. Wonderful! Then I turned to the French original. Marvelous! Then, much later, I read an English translation. Well, that reads well too! Which means that the original must be good, because only a well-formed original will come through in another language. I know this. I have translated things back and forth in these three languages, and I know how any muddy thought, which you don't discover when you read the original, shows up like a sore thumb as soon as you try to phrase it in another language.

Bryson: He had to write in obscurity for a long time before the world's acclaim came to him—because it came very late, didn't it?

Teale: Not until he was in his eighties, really.

Bryson: Before anybody paid any attention to him except—and this is very curious—John Stuart Mill, who happened to live in Avignon and botanized with him, helped him out when he needed money, and so on. It is fascinating that those two men should have been friends. What's the secret of the tremendous impact that he finally made when people really started reading him? Because he died a great man, although it took him ninety-two years to get there. When people started reading him, something happened. What was it?

Ley: The secret of his impact is probably that he was entirely new. He was read by people with very much the same sense of awe, really, as was the journal of Captain Cook's voyage; it was a journey into the unknown.

Bryson: Exploration?

Ley: Exploration—which Jean Henri Fabre had managed to do on this one *hectare*, to use the French measurement, of completely useless land. As a matter of fact, when I was a young man and read the German edition, I was quite . . . I wouldn't say disturbed, but somehow this didn't jibe with my ideas of what France looked like—

this endlessly repeated description of dry ground, of pebbly, hard soil, where you needed a pickaxe to get in. My picture of France had been vineyards, you know, and apple orchards and things of that kind.

Teale: But wasn't there another factor in this? You mentioned Captain Cook's voyages. Fabre, in addition to taking you into a strange new world, also opened your eyes to the things that were around you. He said: "Let us dig our furrow in the fields of the commonplace." And he really opened your eyes to the things close at home. A friend of mine who's a scientist told me that if he were left on a desert island, out of all the books in the world the ones he would like most would be Fabre's because they not only would hold his interest, but would make the place where his lot had been cast more interesting to him.

Ley: I think the impact of Fabre's books was on various levels. One was the exploration idea, the journey into the unknown; a second was the use of mere ingenuity; and a third was—now this is a more modern thought—that you do not need a large laboratory and expensive equipment to make discoveries.

Bryson: He never had any of those things.

Ley: He didn't even have a microscope!

Bryson: He just looked at the insects—the ants, the wasps, the bees, and the beetles—and spotted what they were up to. And the thing you remember—I haven't read Fabre in the original for a great many years, but I did read your admirable selection and annotation of him, Mr. Teale—is that the man's patience was absolutely astonishing; it's awesome.

Teale: Well, he would take as long as thirty years—fifty years in one instance—to piece together little observations here, there, and everywhere. He said the great equipment of his laboratory was time and patience. And they're rather scarce these days. We don't have much time and we don't seem to have as much patience.

Bryson: He also had something else, which seems to me to be the equipment of the really great observer, the great scientist in this sense: he was patient, but he was *alert* all through his patience. He never went to sleep while he was watching a bunch of bugs.

Ley: Well, you know, at one point in his books he complains that the chemist is much better off—because after a chemist has thought out the experiment he wants to try, he can take his time about going into his laboratory, he can mix his ingredients together as, how, and when he sees fit, and watch the result. But he, Fabre, is working with living things—and if they don't want to perform, there is no power that can make them; all he can do is sit and wait and be, as you said, alert every moment of that long wait.

Bryson: And yet he did perform a lot of experiments that, as far as he was concerned, led to certain hypotheses. What's the other side of this man? How is he if you judge him by the validity of his hypotheses? In this book, Mr. Teale, you touch upon his ideas about evolution, which, although Darwin knew him and asked him to perform experiments for him, he never believed in. Is that right?

Teale: That's right—he never accepted evolution. He had rather a narrow viewpoint. But he admired Darwin a great deal; he per-

formed some experiments that Darwin asked him to perform, but he didn't have a chance to get the results to Darwin before Darwin died.

Bryson: After all, Darwin was an observer, too.

Ley: And one of the good ones.

Teale: I think the difference there is that Darwin made great, sweeping, generalized hypotheses, while Fabre kept to just what he saw. He said himself that he was a Doubting Thomas, and that he had to be shown again and again and again.

Bryson: He never saw one species of insect evolve into another, and so he doubted that it could take place. Is that right?

Teale: Well, he said that the strata of the rocks show you the forms of varied creatures, but they don't show you anything about evolution of instinct—which is correct. But he went a great way with his criticism to prod other scientists to perform experiments which have strengthened the theory of evolution.

Ley: Yes, a valid criticism is almost the best push you can give to any scientific hypothesis—because if you get a good criticism, you have to sit back and think up better arguments or better experiments to answer it.

Bryson: That's why scientists in general can argue in pretty good spirit. They know the fellow who criticizes them is helping them out. But what about this instinct business? To him, as I understand it, the world of the insects was a world in which instinct, in the sense of a purely mechanical reaction, ruled absolutely. Insects never reasoned, in his opinion. Is that right?

Teale: That was his weakness.

Bryson: You mean they *do* reason?

Teale: No, I mean that they have a little more latitude than Fabre gave them credit for. His idea was that every insect, because it has such a very short life, doesn't have time to learn—it came into being all equipped with the knowledge of what it was supposed to do.

Bryson: You're getting a little Tealeological here, aren't you, Mr. Teale?

Teale: The fact that insects do have very short lives gives them less time in which to develop any knowledge from experience. When an insect emerges from the cocoon, say, it knows just what to do—or it acts as though it knew just what to do—but it has limitations. I think one of the simplest of Fabre's experiments—and it shows the ingenuity that he had—involves one of the mason bees. This bee emerges from a little nest of masonry that's almost as hard as a rock.

Bryson: Made by its mother?

Teale: Made by the mother bee. It has jaws that can bite through this very hard rock-like material, and when it gets out of there, it flies away. But Fabre wondered what would happen if this creature met something that it would never meet in nature. And so he put a little envelope of paper around the nest, a very thin paper that the wasp or the bee could bite through with just one snip of its jaws.

Bryson: This is outside its nest?

Teale: Outside its hard nest, with a space between the nest and the paper. The emerging bee bit its way through the hard rock-like

masonry, and then met this second obstacle. It wandered around inside the paper envelope until it died.

Bryson: Although one bite would have freed it.

Ley: Didn't Fabre say that the instinct of insects is like a locomotive on a railroad track? It can only go along this one track and no other.

Bryson: I think Fabre was wrong about that, because I've been fighting a war with some yellow jacket hornets in the country for the past week, trying to get some painting done, and they don't stick to a straight track; they follow you—and they get you.

Ley: Well, modern scientific opinion disagrees with Fabre, too.

Bryson: But is his general position on instinct still accepted?

Teale: In general, I think, yes.

Ley: Yes. It's a rather difficult question. Since he made the technological comparison—which was strange for him, to begin with—with a locomotive on a track, let me make one too. I would say that the modern idea of instinct resembles an electric bus, which also has to stick to a track of sorts, but which can go around traffic obstacles and move in and out from the curb.

Teale: Very good!

Bryson: But the limits of deviation are quite narrow?

Ley: The limits are quite narrow.

Bryson: Is it still true in most of these elaborate operations by insects that if you stop the insect halfway through, he doesn't complete the job?

Ley: That is right. This was repeatedly observed later by a German scientist, August Simon, who then evolved a very elaborate theory. His findings were that if you have an operation which takes nine steps, and you interrupt the insect at the fifth step and put it back to the third, it can go on again; but if you interrupt it at the fifth and put it onto another, similar operation by *another* insect which has progressed as far as step number seven, it doesn't know what to do. It can only go in sequence as long as the sequence is connected.

Bryson: In other words, it can't look at the job and say: now this is what needs to be done in this case.

Ley: No, no.

Bryson: And that, I suppose, you'd call reason, wouldn't you?

Ley: Yes.

Bryson: Well, do animals reason in that sense?

Ley: We have all seen a dog sniffing around. That's reason.

Teale: Fabre explains somewhere his idea of what intelligence would be: if the creature is able to overcome the unexpected and the uncertain and the abnormal, that's intelligence.

Bryson: And most insects are not able to do this?

Teale: That's right.

Bryson: Well, what about his actual observation? Did he ever make mistakes in observation?

Teale: He made a few.

Bryson: I'm not trying to find the man's mistakes, I'm trying to

plumb this exhaustive career which produced such great literature in the field. Now we read it for fun; can we trust it?

Ley: Essentially, yes. Or, rather, put it this way: you can trust all the observations reported. In some cases, more modern scientists might tell you that his observation is not complete, and in the rare cases where Fabre draws a conclusion, you may have to be careful in believing the conclusion which he drew. But the observations, to the extent that they were made by him and put down in very clear language, are still reliable.

Bryson: Some of them sound a bit incredible, as I read them, but I suppose one has to believe them.

Teale: Well, I believe you can trust them because they were repeated over and over. One scientist reported that he saw the burying beetles try to bury a mouse; they dug a hole and then they couldn't drag the mouse over to it, and so they went out and collected a group of beetles to help them. That was completely wrong. This man just saw something, and jumped from that to his conclusion.

Bryson: But the beetles did come together and drag the mouse over, didn't they?

Teale: They didn't drag the mouse over; they dug underneath it, and they did it as a community project—but that wasn't the same thing as going out and gathering in the others. There was an erroneous interpretation by the first man, but Fabre, through very elaborate experiments, showed exactly what did happen.

Bryson: Well, what about Fabre's theory that ants navigate by smell, by their formic scent? Doesn't that come into question?

Ley: He doubted that they guide themselves by scent. He knew, of course, that ants follow their beaten path very carefully. But he did not know how they did it and tried to find out. He came to the conclusion that it was not smell that guided them. And now I let Mr. Teale take over.

Teale: Well, very recently scientists have found that ants—some ants, I should say—have a capacity that they didn't realize they had before. They do normally follow trails of formic acid laid down by other ants. I've seen an ant come to a little sugar that had been spilled, and then run away; very shortly, a whole line of ants would come to that same sugar.

Bryson: He had come back and said "That way there's sugar"—and they all came.

Teale: And he had laid down a track, a special kind of a food track, not just an ordinary formic acid track. But they have now discovered that some ants are able to find their way by analyzing polarized light coming from different parts of the sky. Polarized light is essentially light in which the light waves vibrate all on one plane. The eyes of insects being entirely different from ours, it's been proved that some of them can find their way by polarized light.

Bryson: Something we don't see.

Ley: Well, we see it, but we don't differentiate it, and they apparently can.

Teale: Just how that information is transmitted from ant to ant is another problem.

Ley: Now here, of course, you have a discovery that Fabre

couldn't have made because the background in physics was lacking in his time. Polarized light may have been known to the physicists, but not much about it.

Bryson: He had no instruments. We always have to remember that.

Ley: To give another example: Fabre without instruments couldn't have found out that bats guide themselves by a kind of sonar at night, by high-pitched sound waves which the human ear cannot hear.

Bryson: He had to guess at a lot of things, and of course a lot of his guessing was extraordinarily good. But let me ask you this question: you've read him, you say, in three languages?

Ley: Not all of him in all three.

Bryson: But in French—put your judgment here to support mine, if you can, Mr. Ley—but in French he's a writer of extraordinary power?

Ley: Extraordinary power, and simultaneously of extraordinary simplicity.

Bryson: I suppose the two things don't conflict. And in the ordinary, the Mattos translation, you find him effective in English, too?

Teale: Yes, I do. Mattos said that he was one of the easiest people to translate, because his style was simple; it wasn't contorted. I'd like to read a very short paragraph that shows the charm and vividness of his writings. He's talking about when he was a very small child. He says: "There I stand one day, a pensive urchin, with my hands behind my back and my face turned to the sun. The dazzling splendor fascinates me. I am a moth attracted by the light of a lamp. With what am I enjoying this glorious radiance? With my mouth or my eyes? That is the question put to me by my budding scientific curiosity. Readers, do not smile. The future observer is already practicing and experimenting. I open my mouth wide and close my eyes. The glory disappears. I open my eyes and shut my mouth. The glory reappears. I repeat the performance with the same result. The question is solved. I have learned by deduction that I see the sun with my eyes. Oh, what a discovery! That evening I told the whole house about it. Grandmother smiled fondly at my simplicity, the others laughed at it. It is the way of the world."

Bryson: I know. And he went on all his life being surprised that people weren't interested in these exciting discoveries that he was making about nature.

Teale: Yes.

Bryson: Which were important discoveries.

Ley: Oh, naturally, they were very important and, as I said, they were the first of their kind.

Bryson: I think one has to add that in the passage that Mr. Teale has just read, you have what I would call the essential innocence of the man. Maybe that's what you have to have to be a great observer.

Ley: And it lasted him all through his life.

Bryson: He never really lost this childish willingness to submit himself, and all the nature that he could get his hands on, to the experiment—or to ask the question that nobody else ever bothers to ask.

ROBERT FROST

Collected Poems

(As broadcast July 31, 1955)

ERIC LARRABEE

• CHARLES POORE •

LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: We think of Robert Frost as a nature poet, though perhaps he is not the conventional kind of nature poet?

Larrabee: That's certainly true. I've often wondered if it isn't because the conventional image of a nature poet is so strong. People associate the idea of a nature poet with a simple view of bucolic, rustic virtues, or with a kind of Whitmanesque attitude.

Bryson: Or Wordsworth without the intellect.

Larrabee: Yes, if that's possible. Reading Frost you certainly encounter rural images; he's obviously a man versed, as he says, in country things. But now and again you come across something else that's quite different, something that is certainly surprising to encounter in the old idea of a nature poet.

Poore: I think he's not awed by nature. Most nature poets come to nature to admire her and say "how beautiful," while Frost says, "This is nature—sometimes she's beautiful, sometimes she's not."

Bryson: Do you mean that he has a somewhat more masculine attitude toward nature than most?

Poore: He's tougher with nature because he knows the girl. And he says, "She has no interest in us one way or the other."

Bryson: That, of course, is the tragic view of nature. After all, Frost does present himself as a man with a philosophy, even though he's not explicitly a philosophical poet. He has an attitude. He doesn't just react. And that's the tragic attitude toward nature, isn't it?

Larrabee: He certainly has that attitude, but I think he would resist having it defined as tragic. It might be defined as running away from another attitude, or refusing to be pinned down to a different kind of attitude. I was thinking of Whitman's poem about hearing a learned astronomer, and then going out to stare up at the splendor of the stars. You can't imagine Frost doing that.

Poore: But you can imagine him looking at the stars carefully before he went to hear the learned astronomer.

Bryson: Do you mean that Frost is a little more intellectual than Whitman, that he wants to understand nature?

Poore: It's difficult to be more or less intellectual than Whitman, because Whitman had that one dead level of intellect. It occurred to him that it would be wonderful to go first to an astronomer, and then to go out and look at nature. Frost would think of that as a rather tedious, commonplace thing to do.

Bryson: It seems to me that there's a subtlety in Frost which is extraordinarily difficult to locate and pin down. This mind of his,

although he is a nature poet, is an extraordinarily sophisticated mind.

Larrabee: Yes, sophisticated. And he conceals, in a cryptic way, sophisticated meanings in what seem to be simple, straightforward nature poems. You might read the famous poem about the birches and think that here was a simple description of a man's reaction to birch trees that had been bent by ice and wind, or perhaps by a small boy's riding them. The meaning, descriptively, seems quite straightforward. But then you suddenly discover that there is a quite different idea buried in the poem, and that in mentioning the effect that the ice might have had on the trees, he is suggesting some of nature's antipathy or indifference to life. He goes on to say that that is what life is like—the boy who rides upward on the tree should always remember that he's coming back down.

Poore: The modern poet usually takes a very simple idea, or no idea whatever, and makes it tremendously complicated; Frost starts with a very complicated idea, gets a firm grasp on it, and makes it simple, although you realize the complexity behind it at the end.

Bryson: And he does that without obfuscating the meaning. The meaning stays there, although he makes it simple.

Poore: That's it. It's his incredible control. For instance, he's a great New England poet. The New Englander is supposed to be very taciturn, very brisk, very "Calvin Coolidge" in his speech. Frost persuades you that this is true, all right, but really he is one of the most loquacious poets you ever read. His New Englanders talk, talk, talk all the time, and yet they do it with that sharp, clear definition.

Bryson: Perhaps that isn't only Frost: Calvin Coolidge is supposed to have been the most loquacious President we ever had in the White House.

Poore: Like the English, who "never express emotion"—and yet they've produced the most emotional lyric poets the world has seen.

Bryson: Is that why they liked Frost before even the Americans did?

Poore: That may be exactly why.

Larrabee: His first book was, of course, published in England. He was there partly by choice and partly by necessity. Before that he had lived on a New England farm for ten years—perhaps, again, not so much a matter of choice. I'm not entirely convinced by Frost's professional New Englandism that he would have chosen the farmer's life of pre-1914 if he had had a really free opportunity to choose. Was he a good farmer?

Bryson: Well, one doesn't know. Does a good farmer spend his winter nights standing at the window with his wife, thinking how tragic and terrible the world is? That's what a lot of his characters seem to do.

Poore: My reading of New England literature is that that's all New Englanders *ever* do. And they start with the convention that it is impossible to be a good farmer in New England, so you're simply a scrupulous one. You keep turning over those same fourteen stones on your stony acre.

Bryson: Not hoping for a crop, Mr. Poore?

Poore: No, except for wonderful crops of books. And the modern

writers are doing that. They take their typewriters up into the New England hills, and on a summer night, when you open a window, the whole countryside is buzzing with typewriters instead of insects.

Bryson: That's a wonderful picture of Westchester and Putnam counties, around New York, but . . .

Poore: Maybe I'm being a little un-Fairfield.

Bryson: Maybe you are. Mr. Larrabee calls Frost a professional New Englander. But, after all, he wasn't born in New England; he was born in California.

Larrabee: Professional New Englanders are always born elsewhere.

Poore: Usually in California.

Bryson: Well, of course, California has had to have exports as well as imports. But where did he get this attitude that *we* find so completely New England? Are we wrong in thinking of this as New England?

Poore: I wish Frost had stayed in the west.

Bryson: Grown up there?

Poore: Grown up there and become a poet of the west, because we still haven't got a first-rate poet of the west.

Bryson: We haven't had too many first-rate poets of New England, either.

Poore: No, but we have more.

Larrabee: Well, could we raise the question of whether he would have become a western poet?

Bryson: Do you mean his spirit really was New England all the time?

Larrabee: I think Mr. Poore was suggesting that earlier.

Poore: There are eight or ten New England generations behind his California beginnings.

Larrabee: And his move to New England at the age of ten gave him some boy's life north of Boston, but he must have accumulated many of his images earlier than that, because some of them are western. He uses the image of a lariat, for example.

Poore: The grapevine, strung like a lariat . . .

Bryson: I know, but when you find an image like that in a New England poet—a professional New Englander, if you like—he's simply using part of the common speech of America. "Lariat" is not particularly western, although it began as a western word. But there's something here that makes his professional New Englandism, if that's what it is, successful. I'd like to locate it. Is it his tragic view of nature—that nature is no fun, that nature is not kind, that the winter is cold, and so on?

Poore: Well, nature's fun, in that she is a good opponent, a worthy antagonist.

Bryson: But that doesn't mean standing at the window at night, and looking out on the snow and thinking how lonesome you are.

Larrabee: I'd say that what makes him successful in this respect is his deliberate limitation of subject matter. He's narrowed himself down to country subjects, to New England subjects, to a rather nar-

row range in time, to fairly stock situations. He uses these to enlarge out beyond them in meanings, most of all in moral meanings.

Bryson: Aren't you a little astonished, sometimes, at the profound way in which the lonesome farmer talks?

Larrabee: Not entirely. Partly because I don't share the view that they're a taciturn group.

Poore: They aren't at all, no. But I think one of the finest things he ever wrote is *The Death of the Hired Man*. Those two people, while Silas is inside dying, stand there on the back stoop and talk and talk and talk—and they talk wonderfully. They bring in a whole living characterization of Silas' life. The attitude of the New Englander toward the ne'er-do-well is beautifully brought out between the husband and wife. In real life, of course, the man would more likely be saying, "Come, come—I want my supper."

Bryson: Yes, but that's the dramatist's usual privilege, isn't it? Nevertheless, he makes it convincing.

Poore: He makes it wonderfully convincing.

Bryson: You get caught in that quite philosophic argument about what to do with a man who's really not much good. He's only a second-rate hired man, after all, but he's human.

Poore: Do you remember this passage?

*"Warren," she said, "he has come home to die:
You needn't be afraid he'll leave you this time."*

"Home," he mocked gently.

"Yes, what else but home?"

It all depends on what you mean by home.

Of course he's nothing to us, any more

Than was the hound that came a stranger to us

Out of the woods, worn out upon the trail."

*"Home is the place where, when you have to go there,
They have to take you in."*

"I should have called it

Something you somehow haven't to deserve . . ."

That is great writing!

Larrabee: This is one of his constant themes: the question of what you work for, what you deserve, what you get, what you do just for the love of it. In *Two Tramps in Mud Time* he reflects on the fact that he is out in the yard splitting mud, doing work that one of the tramps would prefer to do and be paid for; in fact, thinks Frost, the tramp deserves the work because that's his profession, whereas he is only doing it for the fun of it. And he realizes that, in the silent dispute going on between them, the tramp is quite right. He goes on to say:

But yield who will to their separation,

The object in living is to unite

My avocation and my vocation

*As my two eyes make one in sight.
Only when love and need are one,
And the work is play for mortal stakes,
Is the deed ever really done
For Heaven and the future's sakes.*

Poore: That's wonderful.

Bryson: And it transcends any New Englandism.

Larrabee: Well, it's not an un-New England doctrine.

Bryson: I don't mean that it's un-New England, but that it's not exclusively a New England attitude. It's the best of what he's found there, this attitude that you must unite in the deed both the love of what you're doing and the necessity. That's profoundly human.

Larrabee: And it's personal to Frost, too.

Bryson: But isn't that exactly where he's at his best? He takes this kind of material—two tramps going by, one of whom wants a job splitting wood—and he makes of it something that is quite moving, even if not really deeply disturbing. But he makes you thoughtful. You said he had only one kind of material. You mean that he's at his best only in one kind of material.

Larrabee: Well, I wouldn't limit it.

Bryson: But when he writes, for instance, his two long "masques," which are sort of philosophic disquisitions, they're not really successful, are they? They aren't to me.

Poore: They're impenetrable. They're Frost trying to be E. A. Robinson trying to be Thomas Hardy.

Bryson: They don't get across. But when Frost takes a homely situation and makes that meaningful, he's at his best. And he isn't always austere either.

Larrabee: Not always, because there is another meaning buried behind the first: although there are some things that you do for the love of it, there are others that you don't do for that motive alone. Take the poem called *The Mountain*. Here he's describing a mountain so massive that it takes up most of the psychic life of the people around it; they feel crowded out by it. And a man who has lived at the foot of it all his life, as Frost talks to him, turns out never to have been to the top—even though he's heard there's a spring up there that he would like to see.

Bryson: He's heard about it all his life?

Larrabee: But he's never gone there, and he says to Frost:

'Twouldn't seem real to climb for climbing it.

In other words, it just isn't natural for a man in his situation to climb a mountain for no other reason than the pleasure of climbing. Frost often expresses what, for him, is a belief in limitation—that you mustn't, just for the love of it, try to do things that are not in human nature.

Poore: Do you remember the poem in which he's looking at his two old, worn-out shoes? One of them, it turns out, he dipped in the waters of the Atlantic, and the other in the waters of the Pacific. It's one of the most appalling pieces of symbolism you ever saw.

Bryson: It's Whitman degraded.

Poore: But if you want degraded Whitman, let Whitman do it himself, because he can do it marvelously.

Bryson: Frost doesn't so often degrade himself, but he doesn't stay altogether within his limits. Once in a while he writes a straight lyric apostrophe, like that wonderful poem—I think it's my favorite—addressed to the little orchard in the wintertime:

*"Keep cold, young orchard. Good-bye and keep cold.
Dread fifty above more than fifty below."*

It has a kind of gentleness, a sweetness about it that is perfectly enchanting.

Poore: That marvelous control of nature—telling nature to keep cool.

Bryson: Still, he puts man on top. This is not the kind of nature poem that tells the west wind:

... *Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!*

Larrabee: No, no. Never. In the very short poem about Eve he says that after she sang, birds never sounded the same again. The last line is:

And to do that to birds was why she came.

"To do that to birds . . ."

Bryson: Man is always above nature in these poems.

Larrabee: And a human situation is always drawn from this background of nature, more often than not a didactic situation.

Poore: Situations are always didactic; it takes a good poet to tell us so, because otherwise we might feel that he was scolding us.

Bryson: Well, now, what's he after? You've said that he has a moral in his poems. In a real sense, he has.

Poore: All great art has.

Bryson: I quite agree. But what is his moral? He has certain attitudes—we've talked of some of them.

Poore: I think you've stated it: keep cool!

Bryson: Keep cool? It may be, but there's humor here, too. Is that intended?

Larrabee: Yes, I think it's definitely intended. His way of joking, even with his own meanings, is part of the meaning. That's also what he wants to say: "Don't take me too seriously."

Poore: As in that long poem about the wonders of New Hampshire, in which he does with other states what we must never do with poets: he runs them down. But then the last line is: "At present I'm living in Vermont."

Bryson: That also is New England, isn't it?

Larrabee: Yes, very much.

Poore: He's lucky in his name: he puts a touch of frost on everything.

Bryson: But he was also named Robert Lee. Is there a touch of the south, too?

Poore: Yes, and not enough of the west.

Bryson: You want this man to be a sort of poet of all of America?

Poore: I think that the western story is about the greatest untold

story we have left and no one, except possibly Mark Twain—no, I'll take that back—has told it well. We ought to have a *Death of the Hired Man* about the west.

Bryson: The Death of the Cowboy! But is it possible to have a national poet for America?

Larrabee: Yes. We have had poets who have written nationally very well. In one or two things, Whitman; in several poems, Archibald MacLeish. But no one has been at ease in the west. When they face the west, they say "My, that's a great big mountain!" And then they start spinning a lariat and put on a ten-gallon hat. If they'd just once put on a nine-and-a-half-gallon hat, it would be the beginning of western literature.

Bryson: Of course, we can't blame a man for not being what he isn't.

Larrabee: Well, *art* is blaming man for not being what he isn't, isn't it?

Bryson: And I suppose that's fair?

Larrabee: Frost did try to write one really national poem. It's the short one which, even in its shortness, gets in most of American history, the one that begins "The land was ours before we were the land's."

Bryson: But if you try to make him a national poet, won't you have to say also that he represents what we thought were the American virtues of a couple of generations ago, rather than the political and social temper of America today? This man is the old rock-ribbed individualist. He's not the modern liberal.

Larrabee: He's always saying in substance that those rock-like ideas are still good. The images in his poems since the first World War often refer to politics, which he pretends to reject, and yet something's got under his skin somewhere.

Bryson: He's not a New Dealer?

Larrabee: He certainly is not. He says: "I have none of this tenderer-than-thou collectivistic, regimenting love with which the modern world is being swept." I think he had the New Deal very definitely in mind when he wrote them.

Poore: He has more than once said, "I should have lost my soul to radicalism if it had been the originality it was mistaken for by its young converts." That is being unnecessarily hard and tough, but he feels it very strongly. The reason is that he's neither a New Dealer nor an Old Dealer. He's a complete independent always.

Bryson: Wouldn't he say, if you asked him, that that's exactly the sort of thing he learned on those lonely hillsides and in those cold New England winters? Man is up against an indifferent nature, as both of you have said, and unless he is standing on his own two feet independently he is going to get beaten. He would say that, wouldn't he?

Larrabee: Yes. Apparently he had learned that kind of lesson from his own farm life.

Bryson: You haven't said anything at all about this man's style. What's the hold he has on us? It isn't just his ideas. Ideas don't make a poet by themselves.

Poore: It's Doric.

Larrabee: A very good word for it.

Poore: It's a simplicity of perfection. Frost is a very complicated poet who makes things seem simple until they become complex again, so that a poem of his proceeds from wonder to wisdom.

Larrabee: He does complex things with poetic forms in a very simple guise. *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* is a good example, with its interlocked stanzas and its final repetition:

... But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

Bryson: As with any first-rate writer, you can enjoy him on first acquaintance—you can enjoy just the simple meanings—but the more you read, the more you get.

HORACE

Odes

(As broadcast August 7, 1955)

ROBERT D. MURRAY, JR.

• THE REV. VICTOR YANITELLI, S. J.
LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: One doesn't ordinarily think that great poetry can be made out of happiness, and yet we always think of Horace as a happy man.

Yanitelli: Horace was a happy man, and part of his charm lies in his ability to convey a love of nature and a love of things. But even in his most intimate contacts with nature, I believe, he expresses a brooding sadness that underlies human things in general.

Bryson: That isn't just the feeling that bourgeois happiness can't last forever?

Yanitelli: Oh, no—much more than that.

Murray: I object, though, to the use of "bourgeois happiness" to describe Horace's state of mind.

Bryson: I hoped you would.

Murray: I believe that Horace, under this superficial cover of *carpe diem*—seize the moment, enjoy yourself while you can—is really a serious intellectual. We shouldn't picture him only as sitting under a tree on his Sabine estate and drinking from his jug of Falernian wine, although he may have done a good deal of that on many occasions.

Bryson: What's behind that, or beyond it?

Murray: Behind and beyond it, I suppose, is Horace's feeling that the nature around him on his Sabine estate is the most significant fact of human experience.

Bryson: Man is part of nature?

Murray: Man is part of nature; nature undergoes constant changes, but these changes simply duplicate what goes on in man himself.

Yanitelli: The idea of man duplicating within his own life the cycles that take place in nature comes out very beautifully in Horace, even when he has a pretty girl sitting beside him as he sips his Falernian wine.

Bryson: The pretty girl was part of nature to him, Father Yanitelli.

Yanitelli: Indeed yes, very much—because he is giving the total outlook on life as seen through the eyes of the ancient classicist. It is the good man looking at this world and trying to ask himself, "What does the whole world mean, insofar as I am concerned, and what is my relationship to it?"

Bryson: There is a subtle difference between what Mr. Murray said and what you say: Mr. Murray said that nature duplicated man, while you say that man duplicated in himself the round of nature. Now those are two quite different attitudes. Which did Horace have? If he meant that in man is duplicated the cycle of change in nature, he had a far more profound grasp of man's place in nature than if he thought of nature as being merely symbolic of what happens to man. That wasn't what he meant, was it?

Murray: No, I think it's much more than that. I think that nature, to Horace, was the ultimate reality. He was both an Epicurean and a Stoic, as we know, and to both of those nature was the principal fact of existence.

Bryson: And man is a part of nature in that sense. Nature is not merely a symbolic drama that man regards from the outside for his own moral betterment?

Murray: No indeed. From the Epicurean standpoint, nature is atoms and void undergoing constant change. From the Stoic standpoint, nature—to oversimplify it, perhaps—is a substance, perhaps fire, which also undergoes constant change even though it has this underlying unity.

Yanitelli: We ought to clarify the term "Epicurean," because the modern mind thinks of Epicureanism as nothing more than complete self-indulgence, almost to extremes.

Bryson: *Sensual* self-indulgence, at that.

Murray: I think it's a very important point to bring out. Ancient Epicureanism was a serious philosophy, a highly intellectual philosophy. The Epicurean made his calculus of pleasure and pain, it is true, and based his actions to a certain extent upon that. He found, however, that the intellectual pleasures are by far the most important of life.

Bryson: Intellectual pleasures, enjoyed in tranquility, without too much ambition—in the worldly sense, that is, or even in the intellectual sense. But did the Epicurean particularly want to plumb the secrets of nature in the modern scientific sense?

Murray: No, he did not. I think what the Epicurean wanted to do was to find out what he was made of, and to discover his position in the world. He was interested in science only to that extent.

Bryson: He was Socratic rather than metaphysical, then.

Murray: Definitely, yes.

Yanitelli: The Epicurean, as Horace thought of him—to bring it down specifically to the poet himself—exercised a certain discipline, a balanced view of life. It is Horace's *aurea mediocritas*, that balanced harmony which brings the "golden mean" into life's relationships—including the use of wine, the pretty girls, the close contact with nature. It implies a strong sense of discipline to keep from falling into excess, not only in one direction but in the other.

Bryson: And from taking any of these things too seriously?

Yanitelli: Correct. Horace could laugh at himself.

Bryson: He could even laugh at the Stoic elements in his own philosophy, as occasionally he did like any other very worldly person. Isn't it amusing that Horace, who spent the happiest and most productive part of his life on a little farm outside Rome, should be the favorite poet of all really worldly people? But what's under his worldliness?

Yanitelli: I think that his sophistication can very frequently lead us astray. We're inclined to think of him only as a man who ate, drank, was merry, and died on the morrow.

Bryson: But it wasn't just symbolic; that's the way he lived. He was expressing an active philosophy when he said "eat, drink, and be merry," only he thought there was more to it than just that.

Murray: Yes, he also says "do all this in moderation; always be very careful about that, or you won't really enjoy yourself after all." And beyond the appreciation of the good things of life, of the wines of Italy and the beauties of the countryside, there's always this emphasis in Horace on the importance of intellectual activity.

Bryson: He did something which seems to me has to be examined from a moral point of view, because, after all, almost everything that can be said about Horace's poetry has already been said. But his complete withdrawal from active life—how do you justify that in a man who sees life seriously?

Murray: I think we should stress that Horace seriously thought of himself as the *vates*, the bard, in the old Greek tradition. Now it's true that he laughs at this notion of occasion, but I think there is an underlying seriousness in his belief that the writing of these odes, for example, is the most useful thing he could do for mankind. He knew that he could write odes, he knew that he was a good poet.

Yanitelli: What makes Horace an inexhaustible poet, what gives him something to feed each generation and each century, is the fact that he deals with the fundamental human things. It is true that he has an undertone of sadness, that he continually sounds the note that we can't hold anything permanently here on earth. Horace, for all his balance and wisdom in things human, really is asking of the classic pagan something that we Christians cannot ask. He says: "There is no hope; everything is passing; make the best of what you've got." And then he adds, very courageously, "Do not despair." The Christian says: "Things change, yes, but we at least hold out the hope of a future happiness and a fulfillment."

Bryson: It's interesting that he asks more of his pagan friends than a Christian would dare to ask. The attitude of the early Church

toward Horace was that he was a rather dangerous poet, wasn't it?

Yanitelli: Oh, yes—right up to the Middle Ages, where they went so far as to change some of his words. While admitting the classic perfection of the *Odes*, they insisted on changing the girls' names to innocuous things such as Charity or Friendship.

Bryson: Even the Romans didn't name girls Friendship. That's too flat a name for a pretty girl. Is it satisfactory, Mr. Murray, to accept this idea that his odes were the greatest contribution he could have made? Does one accept that in terms of American ethics?

Murray: I don't know whether others do, but I think that I tend to accept it.

Bryson: Well, you're the one I was thinking of.

Murray: I think, then, that Horace could have done nothing better for mankind than he did by withdrawing to his Sabine farm and writing his odes. After all, these odes have been popular for two thousand years now, and popular in so many countries. Oddly enough, we English-speaking people seem to claim him as *our* poet. Of course the Italians claim him as their poet, and I think the French believe that Horace is very Gallic indeed. I'm not so sure about the Germans or the Spanish. But, at any rate, he has had this enduring popularity. He's been a great consolation to many people and, in addition, he produced odes that are esthetically just about perfect.

Yanitelli: Ronsard speaks of his sonnets as following "the long flight of the graceful wing of Horace." And Wilkinson points out that in Sweden, in a cemetery, you might find two people murmuring a prayer and recognize, if you draw close enough, the words *integer vitae*—spoken of the man who is pure of life and free from stain.

Bryson: I'm pushing this a little bit, but it seems to me that I'm really asking in other terms, "Is Horace a good poet for Americans?" We think of our own civilization as being activist; we tend, in our favorite philosophers, toward those who say "Truth is what will work; one gets out and does something for the world." And, after all, we're supposed to be pragmatists with both a small P and a large one. Horace doesn't seem to fit that, somehow. He seems to fit eighteenth-century England, just as he seems to fit what we think of as the French point of view. What does he mean to Americans?

Yanitelli: In the American way of life, Horace certainly holds up for—I don't like to use the word "minority," but for those of us who understand and believe in the usefulness of disinterested study of man, of nature, of things as they are. Which is one step, I believe, or perhaps two, beyond this industrial activist civilization. I'm not speaking against an industrial activist civilization, but I am saying that to give it a human value we must always have these scholars. The scholar's life, I think, is its own justification, for the very reason that it feeds the spirit.

Murray: I think it might also be added that Horace was not only a scholar but an artist, and that as an artist he produced works of art which have, like a painting or a musical composition, intrinsic value.

Bryson: Let's push it a bit further: suppose Horace had not been one of the most perfect artists in the history of literature, but had

been a third- or fourth-rate artist; would his withdrawal into the contemplative life and his laborious line-a-day regimen still have been of value to his time and to us?

Murray: I would doubt that. But Horace *knew* that he was a first-rate poet.

Bryson: You don't think it's the product of this contemplative life? The example is not worth anything?

Murray: I wouldn't go so far as to say that.

Yanitelli: There is no doubt that it is the work of art, as produced by Horace, that gives him his value. But if we ask whether he would still have the same value as a third- or fourth-rate artist, therefore producing a third- or fourth-rate product . . .

Byson: But still being a representative of the contemplative life, Father Yanitelli.

Yanitelli: I think it's impossible to do that adequately without being a real artist.

Bryson: Adequately, yes; but you see what I'm thinking about is this activist civilization of ours, and the fact that a great many people are devoting themselves to scholarship, to thought, to contemplation, to Epicurean quietude. How do you justify them?

Murray: I think that for Horace, at least, the answer would be that life in terms of enjoyment of nature is its own justification.

Bryson: That's what I was wondering about—that the mere enjoyment of nature, honestly and without excess, is a perfectly defensible way of spending your life. Horace would have said that, wouldn't he?

Murray: I think so, yes: to live without ambition, without hurting others.

Yanitelli: I think Horace actually did say it in almost exactly those words. We must understand that that is the humanistic point of view of the pagan, who has not been granted anything like revelation.

Bryson: We must always remember that he died eight years before the birth of Christ; he didn't live in the Christian era at all.

Yanitelli: That's right.

Bryson: He had no chance to be a Christian.

Yanitelli: And for the humanist, I think Horace has given us about as good and as artistic a picture of life as could be found in the poetry of any era.

Bryson: We keep talking about the perfection of his poetry. There's no question about the fact that those who have the best taste and who know Latin best have all agreed on that. What are the elements of it? When you try to tell young men at Princeton, Mr. Murray, that Horace was a great poet, how do you convince them?

Murray: It's a very difficult problem, indeed, especially if you're not teaching it in the original Latin. Translations do fail, we must admit, to convey the real esthetic qualities that Horace achieves. These qualities lie to a very great extent in his mastery of Latin, in his ability to control words, to place words so that the right one hits you at precisely the right moment. In translation, of course, you cannot achieve this.

Bryson: You have an example handy?

Murray: Well, there are so many in Horace that it would be almost arbitrary to pick one out.

Bryson: You can open Horace almost anywhere and find this mastery of words?

Murray: Yes, I think I can. And yet it's very difficult to convey. Perhaps I can give a brief example from the end of this short and famous poem, *O Fons Bandusiae—The Spring of Bandusia*. He writes in these sixteen lines of the beauty of a little spring—near his estate, presumably—which he calls *splendidior vitro*, "more brilliant, more shining than glass." He concludes with a device that we don't much like in English poetry, for some reason, and that is alliteration. But here Horace's choice of words, it seems to me, beautifully suggests the liquid flow of the fountain:

. . . *impositam ilicem*
Saxis unde loquaces
Lymphae desiliunt tuae.

Bryson: It gives you a perfect sense of this fluent quality we've spoken about. Where does his originality lie? No first-rate poet ever is without some originality.

Yanitelli: Grammarians have shown us in his poetry the perfect patterns of juxtaposed words, noun and adjective forming a cross with noun and adjective. The picturesque quality of these odes lies not only in their music, which Mr. Murray has demonstrated so well, but in their appeal to the eye.

Murray: I think that's an extremely interesting point. Even disregarding all of the content of Horace's odes, you can still say that one of the better ones is like a little abstract painting, which can be enjoyed simply on its own terms.

Yanitelli: His odes, in fact, have very frequently been compared to just that: the work of a painter. Sometimes it is a stated realistic picture, and sometimes something that feeds the soul by suggestion rather than by a clear statement of its meaning.

Bryson: We seem to have avoided, almost by intention, the aspect of Horace that makes some people doubt his moral stature. I mean the fact that he was dependent upon the kindness of a patron. We've said nothing about Maecenas, who is rather a famous historical character—mostly because Horace made him so, I suppose. Is Horace the kind of person who could have existed only under an emperor with absolute power and a patron to help him out and give him his little Sabine farm? He was the son of a freedman, he was completely impoverished, he'd fought on the wrong side in the civil wars—and yet a man comes along and gives him a handful of gold and a little farm. That wouldn't happen today. Is that part of his picture of life that we have to take into account?

Murray: Yes, we do, and yet Horace was not very different from any other Roman poet or, one might add, many Greek poets.

Bryson: Well, it was part of his time. But today a poet has to please a different kind of patron. He has to please the general public, doesn't he?

Murray: That depends, I suppose, on the art and on the public that he's aiming at. Horace, actually, was lucky. He had a pretty good patron and he didn't have to please him except to write good poetry.

Bryson: And he was popular almost right from the day he began to publish, wasn't he?

Yanitelli: Yes. Even before his death, children were studying his odes in the Roman schools. Don't you think, though, that Horace has something which makes him enduring and of appeal to the general public at all times? Even though he was given this opportunity by Maecenas, he has endured not because he had a patron but because he produced works of art.

Bryson: I'm just thinking about the effect of this dependence on a single individual. Although the odes do pay affectionate tribute to both Maecenas and the Emperor, was he sycophantic in this? Did he really love these men as much as he said, or is he necessarily being insincere because it was his livelihood? It puts a kind of doubt in one's mind, and some people even think that it represents an evil situation.

Murray: I don't think so. In the first place, Horace frequently tells Maecenas that he's not going to do what Maecenas has asked him to do; he's not going to write epic poems, he's not going to write any kind of poetry that he doesn't want to; he's going to go on writing the sort of thing for which he's equipped.

Bryson: But he also says, "I'm going to write the best poetry of this kind that anybody ever wrote." I mean that he did not underestimate his own qualities.

Yanitelli: He had a rather tenuous situation to maintain. But the question of his sincerity, I believe, is not to be disputed. Would you agree with that?

Bryson: Yes, I think I would. But how about getting Horace now? After all, not too many people read Latin. Is it possible to translate this man?

Yanitelli: It is possible to translate him, but I would say that it is almost impossible to translate him *in verse*. The Wickham translation, in prose, is a little archaic, but it does convey pretty well the spirit of each of the odes.

Murray: I think also that one might look into the Modern Library collection, where you get at least a diversity of translations. They're not all good, but at least you can see from that what Horace *isn't*.

Bryson: On a kind of statistical basis you'd get some idea of what he is. But it seems a pity when a man, in the original Latin, has meant so much to generations of people—a sort of example of Aristotle's magnanimous man in a rather sweet and ingratiating way. But it's too late now to think that people are going to go back and learn Latin, even for Horace. We have to dig him out as best we can.

JOEL CHANDLER HARRIS

The Uncle Remus Stories

(As broadcast August 14, 1955)

JOHN SELBY

• BERNARD WOLFE

• LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: I suppose Joel Chandler Harris could be called a nature writer, since we're discussing nature writers in this series, but I remember that in my first acquaintance with him I was constantly looking for something else in the animal characters that he used. Maybe he isn't a nature writer?

Wolfe: I would say quite strongly that he is *not* a nature writer in the sense that La Fontaine was.

Bryson: You don't accept this parallel?

Wolfe: No, not at all. I think that inevitably in any kind of fable about animals there are some human overtones, but I think that in this case the meanings are almost exclusively human and are related to a specific social context, namely, that of slavery.

Bryson: Brer Rabbit is never just a *rabbit*?

Wolfe: That's what I think. I think he has no interest and no identity as an animal whatsoever.

Selby: But at what level are you taking nature? There isn't anything off-key whatever in what Harris says about the birds, the bees, the trees, and the river.

Bryson: Do you, Mr. Selby, think he is a nature writer?

Selby: In a sense, I do—yes.

Bryson: Of course, it doesn't matter what he is, but I think Mr. Wolfe's point is worth thinking about, because the question is this: is Harris really trying to tell us something about animal nature or just something about human nature?

Selby: I've always suspected that what he really was trying to do was to amuse people.

Bryson: That's the first business of an artist, anyway, isn't it? But sometimes when you get to thinking about an artist you suspect that maybe he had something else up his sleeve.

Wolfe: Well, assuming that he is amusing—and I would quarrel with that judgment, too, although I must add that I did not get around to reading these stories until I was thirty years old . . .

Bryson: You were hardened by that time?

Wolfe: I suspect that I was more receptive then than I would have been at an earlier age.

Selby: Mr. Wolfe, may I ask a question: were they read to you or did you read them?

Wolfe: I read them myself, and I admit that that might make considerable difference.

Selby: Well, it does make a vast difference. I made the acquaintance of Brer Rabbit at, I suppose, five or six. My father and my grand-

mother read the stories to me and I *heard* them rather than saw them. I think the dialect is very difficult to read.

Bryson: Was the dialect read to you with what you felt was conviction? You came from the south, I understand.

Selby: I had one leg in the south—I was born in Missouri.

Bryson: That's one of those equivocal states where you can call yourself anything you like.

Selby: My town was a southern town, it's quite true.

Bryson: And you felt that this is the way a Negro could talk?

Selby: I *know* it's the way a Negro could talk, because it's the way a nurse of mine talked. Isn't this rather interesting, though—a moment ago we began talking about whether these are really animals, and now we're talking about whether the Negro is represented authentically here. I think this is precisely the point: that Brer Rabbit does represent the Negro.

Bryson: Well, of course, it's Uncle Remus' style as well as Brer Rabbit's and Brer Fox's style.

Selby: Yes, but it's not by accident that all of the dialogue of the animals is given to us through the mouth of Uncle Remus.

Bryson: I think we ought to tackle this question of the dialect right now. Could you possibly have read these stories as a child? Could you have read this complicated, queer-looking stuff?

Selby: I can't answer because I didn't try, frankly; but I managed every word of Dickens by the time I was twelve, and Dickens can be just as knotty, it seems to me.

Bryson: Dickens didn't do one thing that Joel Chandler Harris did consistently, and one that seems to make unnecessary difficulties: he'll take a perfectly common word—the word "neighborhood" comes to mind—and instead of spelling it as it should be, he spells it n-a-b-e-r-h-o-o-d. Well, now, it's still pronounced the same, but on the printed page it becomes an extraordinarily difficult-looking word.

Selby: That's quite true. He may have done it just for the look of the thing. I don't know.

Bryson: He does it all the time!

Wolfe: That always annoys me intensely when I see it, as does any kind of dialect writing. I think it implies a very definite emotional attitude toward the person being described. It's one of condescension, certainly, to begin with, and it's one of delight in the character's illiteracy. I think this is a crucial point regarding Harris' whole attitude in this series of stories.

Bryson: You're quite serious about that?

Wolfe: Yes, really.

Bryson: Condescension seems to be the key word here, Mr. Wolfe. You think that Joel Chandler Harris was trying to depict the Negro as a kind of, well, inferior being that one loved as one loves animals?

Wolfe: I don't think he was *trying* to; I think it came quite naturally to him. He came out of a culture in which these attitudes existed and he wholeheartedly acquired them and passed them on, uncritically. It seems to me there's no question but that his attitude was one of horror that the Civil War had ever taken place; his feeling

was that a Negro who was genuinely a Negro, whatever that might mean in his terms, was one who had nothing but nostalgia for the institution of slavery. He says this, in so many words, about Remus.

Bryson: Well, did he know any other kind of Negro?

Selby: I don't think he did. I think the only kind of Negro he knew was the kind he wrote about.

Wolfe: But I don't think that's true. Judging from the material that he published in the *Atlanta Constitution*, where he wrote a column for many years, he saw many other kinds of Negroes in the period after the Civil War. He objected to them and wrote sarcastic and embittered comments about what was, to him, their obstreperous behavior.

Bryson: Then you are saying that Uncle Remus was to him not only typical of the kind of Negro that he knew, but exemplary of the kind that he wanted?

Wolfe: Yes, and I might add exemplary of a kind that was already almost entirely nonexistent at the time that he began to write about them. How many Negroes do you suppose in 1880 had a real nostalgia for slavery?

Selby: Oh, I think a great many did. I don't just say that. I know I sound almost like a professional southerner, which is nonsense. I'm not a southerner at all.

Wolfe: If you are saying that Negroes in the period after the Civil War were subjected to enormous hardship, I can hardly deny that; but I doubt that their reaction to the hardship was a yearning for the reinstitution of slavery. That's what Uncle Remus definitely has in mind in these stories. He says it.

Bryson: If you are right, the tragedy here is far deeper than Harris himself could have seen.

Wolfe: I am quite sure of that.

Bryson: Because the worst thing you could say about slavery is that it would so condition a human being that he wanted to be a slave.

Wolfe: Even worse is that it so conditioned not only Negroes, but people like Joel Chandler Harris, so that they were unable to see reality.

Selby: To back that up I think we almost have to believe that Harris was a little boy in velvet pants on a plantation, with flocks and flocks of slaves around him, and all that sort of thing. It's nonsense. It isn't true. He was a very poor boy. He was so poor that he trapped rabbits and sold three skins a day for twenty cents.

Bryson: But even a westerner like me knows that there were two kinds of white people in the old south, the impoverished and the poor. The impoverished were people of good blood who were not "white trash." Now he never was "poor white trash," was he?

Selby: No.

Bryson: So he did belong emotionally to the slave-owning group?

Selby: I don't believe that he had any continuous connection with it at all.

Wolfe: When he was a very young boy—before he had reached his teens, I believe—there was a wealthy plantation owner nearby who sort of adopted him. That is, not legally—but he was interested in

Harris because he was a bright boy and he had Harris in his home a good deal.

Selby: That's true.

Wolfe: He gave him his first tutoring, exposed him to the world of books, and so on; I believe that the culture that the plantation owner represented became quite important to him.

Selby: It's possible that it had an influence. I wouldn't doubt that, but I doubt that anybody in 1880 in Georgia could have been what we are in 1955. It doesn't make very good sense.

Bryson: Do you think we're doing Harris an injustice?

Selby: I think we're reading into it an awful lot of stuff that didn't enter into it at the time.

Wolfe: I would like to say that the point isn't whether anybody in 1880 could be where we are today; the point is that Harris objected to people being what they were *in 1880*. He wanted a reinstitution of 1850. He couldn't accept the reality of 1880.

Bryson: Are you sure that that's the most important thing about Joel Chandler Harris? After all, literary work, a work of art, can always be taken in at least two ways. To begin with, just as a work of art did it delight you? Did it amuse you?

Wolfe: Making very clear again that I didn't become acquainted with these stories until just a few years ago, I have to add that I find just about no esthetic merit in them. I don't think that they can be taken very seriously as literature when they are compared with the productions of other fabulists.

Bryson: And you don't think that's because your condemnation of Harris' attitude toward the Negro is coloring your literary opinion?

Wolfe: Not at all. I have read other material that is more or less anti-Negro in content, but which still seems to me to have literary merit.

Selby: At what level do you put esthetic? I think they have very definite esthetic values. For instance, the story about the rabbit and the 'coon. That's a little gem, I think.

Bryson: A gem as what, Mr. Selby?

Selby: As literature!

Bryson: Because it charms you?

Selby: Because it charms and because it's well done. It's perfect in proportion. There's no esthetic reason why it isn't a darn good story.

Wolfe: I don't think that what you're talking about has much to do with esthetics as such. If you say the story has charm, has some folk value, that's another matter, and you may very well be right about some of these stories. But not about all of them, by the way.

Bryson: Perhaps I shouldn't have thrown that word "esthetic" in here. I didn't mean it as a disturbance. All I meant was this: do these things have a value in themselves, as literature always has, regardless of background, historical time, character of the author, his attitude, or anything else?

Wolfe: I will say this, and it will make even clearer the fact that I have considerable hostility toward Mr. Harris, as well as toward his so-called literary product: insofar as there is any value of the sort you're talking about in these stories, I believe that it exists there almost

in spite of Harris—simply because the stories did not originate with him. They did have some very definite folk roots. They are originally Negro stories and he carefully compiled them, adding the format that he hit upon in using Uncle Remus as narrator. Well, it's a question of how much genuine creativity is involved here. He had a very definite stereotype of the Negro, which he simply put down on paper. I can't argue about how accurate his ear was. I don't know about that. I gather that Mr. Selby thinks that he was . . .

Selby: Very accurate indeed. But, you know, Mr. Wolfe, I think you're making a sort of a Machiavellian character out of Harris.

Wolfe: Not at all! Really not! I don't think that he was at all conscious of the processes I'm talking about, the subjective processes that led to his writing these things. For example, it's perfectly clear from the biography done by, I believe, his daughter, that he was all his life a frustrated novelist. He talked many times about the long novel that he wanted to do, that he had cooking. He never got around to writing this novel—that is, to real creativity, not the borrowing of folk materials—until he was forty-eight years old. He wrote two of them. They were terrible duds. Nobody paid any attention to them and he was deeply hurt. He resented the fact that he had to fall back on other people for material, and there were many accusations of plagiarism.

Bryson: Of course, all fabulists do that. La Fontaine did it, even Aesop did it.

Wolfe: Certainly, but I imagine that they could have defended themselves rather more certainly than Harris did. No: I'm saying that he was a touchy, sensitive guy who was very much aware of the processes of irritation and attraction and repulsion in him.

Selby: But to get really—I hate to use the word basic, but nevertheless—*basic*, don't you think that was true of the fables in their African version? I mean, who was the Machiavelli?

Wolfe: Can you prove that they were African in origin?

Selby: I can't *prove* it. I can't prove anything, as a matter of fact, because I don't know enough about it, but I understand that a good many of them have an African counterpart.

Wolfe: Well, that is what Harris claimed, certainly, and he claimed it with such vehemence that I begin to wonder if it was an accurate statement.

Selby: He reversed himself also.

Wolfe: Yes, he did.

Selby: He later said they were not.

Bryson: Of course, the animals don't sound very African. But I'm interested in this picture of the Negro, which Mr. Wolfe rejects and which you say, Mr. Selby, should be accepted as typical of its time.

Selby: Please don't think I'm trying to make an Uncle Tom out of Uncle Remus. I don't think there's any connection at all.

Bryson: No, I know that. But what is this picture? I mean, what are Uncle Remus' characteristics? Nostalgia for slavery, you said.

Wolfe: There are many values involved that lead to a concept of personality, I think. Insofar as I can define it, I would say that Harris' concept of Remus—and, by implication, of the ideal Negro—is of a

man who recognizes that he is a lower species of animal than the white man; who accepts this uncomplainingly; whose attitude is first of all one of humility and, then, a recognition of inferiority and acceptance of it; who reacts with unvarying kindness toward his superiors, as though he actually welcomed their presence as a steadier and directing force in his life. As a matter of fact, a good many of them probably did.

Bryson: Yes. But now, Mr. Selby, let's take you as the amateur southerner here . . .

Selby: Very amateur!

Bryson: We'll deny you the onus of being a professional. Brer Rabbit represents, as we all know, the underdog Negro who always puts it over on the big, powerful fox and wolf and all the rest of them, who represent the white man. What about all the butchery, all the destruction, all the boilings and the head choppings? Did Brer Rabbit really feel kindly toward the white man, or did he like the idea of boiling him in a pot?

Selby: I think that sort of destroys Mr. Wolfe's argument.

Wolfe: But to take that attitude ignores what I think is an essential clue to the personality of Harris, namely, that there was a tremendous contradiction, a real ambivalence, in his attitude toward the Negro as well as toward race relations.

Bryson: He couldn't have been an author if he hadn't had some ambivalence.

Wolfe: But he turned out not to be a real author because he had too much ambivalence. He never could actually create what he wanted to create. He must have had a feeling of tremendous embitterment because he had to derive his materials from the Negro over and over.

Selby: I don't think of Mr. Harris as a terribly frustrated author. He really had quite a respectable success. The only evidence I can give is that of his son, Julian. He didn't think that his father was frustrated at all. He thought he had an extremely happy life.

Wolfe: In that case the son and the daughter seem to disagree rather strongly. The daughter, in her biography, very clearly . . .

Selby: Daughter-in-law, incidentally.

Wolfe: Oh, I see. In that case she might be more objective.

Bryson: She might be more objective, but less well informed.

Wolfe: She lived close to him for many, many years. There's a wealth of information about him.

Bryson: But to go back to the theme of these fables of the underdog constantly putting it over on the strong . . .

Selby: I think that contradicts Mr. Wolfe's argument. I don't think he accepted the Negro's condition in the sense that Mr. Wolfe means at all. The Negro, if you take Brer Rabbit to be the Negro, always won.

Bryson: Yes, that's true. But he always won by trickery, by deceit, by being more clever, and by always running away at the end. It's very interesting that Brer Rabbit at the end of every story, where he's victorious, is disappearing over the hill.

Selby: Taunting his pursuers.

Bryson: Because he has won by trickery, except once. It seems

to me, since you gentlemen are interested in the significance of this thing, that the story of the Tar-Baby has to be taken into account.

Wolfe: I think its meanings are quite central here. The Tar-Baby story, as I remember it, has to do with a figure of tar in the form of a baby, which Brer Rabbit fashions . . .

Bryson: Brer Fox fashions it!

Wolfe: You're quite right. It's the fox. He places it at the side of the road. Brer Rabbit comes along and demands a respectful address from the Tar-Baby; he doesn't get it and strikes the Tar-Baby. Very soon both hands and feet are stuck.

Bryson: Which was exactly Brer Fox's idea.

Wolfe: Yes; stuck in some kind of oozy blackness from which he cannot extricate himself until he tricks the fox into releasing him, which I think has great symbolic racial overtones.

Selby: I was afraid you were going to say that!

Wolfe: I don't see any other explanation for it, as a matter of fact.

Selby: I think these stories were written for fun.

Wolfe: Well, that may have been the only thing that Harris was conscious of. But assuming that what he himself says is correct—that he got these stories from the Negroes—the question is, did Negro slaves approach the creation of them with the same innocence? It seems to me that the Tar-Baby symbol must have been an eloquent one to Negro slaves.

Bryson: You think that maybe Joel Chandler Harris was an innocent reporter of something that was very complicated?

Wolfe: Only in the sense that he was not fully conscious of it.

Selby: What we're talking about as social conscience simply didn't exist in 1880, and it didn't exist for a long time afterward. I believe that if you read into the Tar-Baby all that you could—I could read things into it from now until half-past-five—you'll just complicate the story. It's a good story. It's a nice little story. It has a point.

Wolfe: Mr. Selby, why do you insist on discussing only conscious intent in conscious content?

Selby: If I may be disrespectful to Mr. Harris, I don't think that he was a great brain at all. I don't think he was a Machiavellian character.

Wolfe: He was not a great brain, but he certainly had an unconscious portion of that brain.

Selby: He's a pretty good reporter and his transliteration of Negro dialect is as good as anybody's.

Bryson: Well, then, that's about it. You're saying, Mr. Selby, that the complications here, the hidden malevolence and the symbolization of the underdog in Brer Rabbit, who always gets out by trickery—all this was anterior to Mr. Harris; it was in the original fables and he just repeated it as a good reporter and didn't see it himself. But it's there, isn't it?

Selby: It can be read into it. Anything can.

Bryson: Well, wouldn't you suspect that it was there? In the original folklore creation.

Selby: Perhaps. But some of these stories are supposed to have

originated in Africa, where the same set of circumstances doesn't exist.

Bryson: To me that casts great doubt on their having originated in Africa. I think they come out of a slave situation.

Wolfe: Incidentally, the pattern which you pointed out before—that of the weak animal constantly triumphing over the stronger—suggests to me another origin for these stories, namely, the Reynard the Fox stories, which came out of the Flemish areas in the Middle Ages. They have been a living part of western culture, and one which Negro slaves could have been in contact with through their white masters. The interesting thing to me is that the hero, the animal who triumphs over and over in the Reynard stories, is the fox, while the Rabbit appears only incidentally as the *coward*, the coward. Now it seems to me that if this material was taken over from the whites by Negro slaves, you have an interesting possibility that they reversed the values and made the defeated, weak rabbit the master over the strong fox.

Bryson: I suppose you'd say, Mr. Selby, and I think Mr. Wolfe might question it, that these stories are still worth reading if you can get over the difficulties of dialect.

Selby: Yes, I do. I don't think that they're great literature in any sense at all, but . . .

Bryson: You don't confine yourself entirely to great literature, do you?

Selby: I certainly don't. I read for pleasure a great deal, and I'd like other people to do the same thing.

Wolfe: For myself I can only say that I often read for amusement, too, but I find these stories for the most part abysmally unamusing.

Selby: It's a matter of taste.

Bryson: Yes, a matter of taste. But I think Mr. Wolfe touches on something here which is very interesting about any author who once had a great vogue. It is that he may have struck his contemporaries as being amusing, but we know too much, our perspective is too different, to take him as merely amusing.

Selby: I still find him fun, and if you want to say that it's because of my one southern leg—why, maybe it is.

Wolfe: Well, perhaps because of my two Connecticut legs, I don't find him fun.

Bryson: I still get a certain amount of pleasure from these stories, but I find them extremely monotonous because the same pattern runs all the way through them. That seems to bring up your point, Mr. Wolfe—that this man is saying something that he may not himself have known that he was saying.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Travels with a Donkey

(As broadcast August 21, 1955)

EDGAR JOHNSON

• PIERRE SZAMEK

• LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: A book that talks about going somewhere with a donkey is necessarily a book about nature, if only about a donkey's nature. This book is generally thought of as a travel book more than anything else, but is that a fair representation of it?

Johnson: Actually, I think it's something a little more; it's the story of a man having a good time.

Bryson: And how does anyone make somebody else think he's having a good time? It's always very difficult to convey enthusiasm.

Szamek: But difficult, too, to know where to bite into the conscience of a man, and that's what you have to do here.

Johnson: To answer your question, Mr. Bryson, I think that one conveys having a good time by actually having a good time.

Bryson: And setting out deliberately to have one?

Johnson: Precisely. This book was an enterprise deliberately undertaken for the purpose of making money; it's an example of journalism, in a way, turning into literature.

Bryson: You mean that he set out to have a good time so that he could write about having a good time and make some money?

Johnson: Exactly so. He chose the place that he went to because he anticipated that he would enjoy it.

Szamek: Well, ostensibly his reason was to work on a new book, which he was at that time preparing for publication.

Bryson: But I'm interested in his choice of places. Now the Cévennes mountains where he went in southern France are not a very benign part of that benign country. The region is rather rugged, it's not at all what we think of as typical French countryside. The peasants are dour. It's much more like Scotland than it is like sunny France. Is that the reason he chose it?

Johnson: That may very well be the reason. I think that there was a good deal of the Scot and of the Scottish temperament in Stevenson; and, certainly, the landscape of the Cévennes is similar in many ways to that of Scotland. The peasants are, in certain ways, similar to the Scottish lowland peasants. It may very well have been a sense of the familiar that attracted him.

Szamek: And something more, too, which may be difficult for us old men to realize: that he, at this time, was a very young man. He was twenty-eight and free, and it's a good feeling to be free in the universe at twenty-eight and to go up onto a mountain and view the dominion of man and God from your little vantage point, which is

what he did. He had a companion too, as a matter of fact, a delightful little idiot donkey who went along with him.

Bryson: Before you get onto the subject of Modestine, may I question the fact that he was entirely free at this moment? He was driven by a desire to marry Fanny Osbourne and that's one of the reasons he had to have money, wasn't it?

Szamek: He actually wanted to get money for her divorce, which is a strange kind of thing. She at that time was married, and financing the divorce was an expensive piece of business; he wanted to earn money to pay for the divorce so that he could marry her. There's one really entrancing passage in which he speaks of his longing for her. Here he is in the wild mountains of France and he hears, one night, a voice that is almost a sob: he hears someone singing and it reminds him of Fanny.

Johnson: I don't have precisely that passage in mind, but I have another that illustrates your point: "How the world gives and takes away, and brings sweethearts near, only to separate them again into distant and strange lands; but to love is the great amulet which makes the world a garden; and 'hope which comes to all' outwears the accidents of life, and reaches with tremulous hand beyond the grave and death. Easy to say: yea, but also, by God's mercy, both easy and grateful to believe!"

Szamek: You are a realist, Mr. Johnson. I was much more moved by this passage where he's wandering through the woods and hears a woman singing some sad, old, endless ballad not far off. It seems to be about love and her handsome sweetheart, and he wishes that he could take up the strains and answer her as he passes on his invisible woodland way. That, to me, is the true romantic spirit. It's almost a sob, this longing for a woman.

Bryson: Well, forgive me for saying it, but that isn't exactly being free. He was very much in love and he was up against very practical problems. But what I'd like to know is how something which is done for a practical purpose, deliberately, turns out to be a work of art—because, undoubtedly, this book has genuine vitality and a certain immortality about it.

Johnson: It lies, I think, in the personality of the writer. It's a matter of internal vividness of response, of vitality of perception, of aliveness of feeling. It is this, it seems to me, that Stevenson exhibits constantly throughout the course of this book, even in his response to very minor things indeed.

Bryson: Such as his adventures with Modestine.

Szamek: The silly little donkey.

Johnson: With Modestine you have an exploitation of all the possibilities, both of comedy and of comic frustration, that can come out of a man's relationship with such a recalcitrant small beast.

Szamek: Yes, and Stevenson never fails to point out that this is a female donkey.

Johnson: Who meets a male donkey, both of them nickering with joy at the sight of each other. But this episode reminded me in a great many ways of Mr. Pickwick's difficulties with the troublesome horse, on the way to Dingley Dell. Stevenson works it out in a very similar

way, with the human being finding himself frustrated by the sheer resistance of animal nature.

Szamek: As a matter of fact, there's something of Mr. Pickwick in this book, don't you think? I mean the same casual roadside wanderings and adventures, the endless adventures which were so popular in England at this time.

Bryson: And so deliberately comic. I would never venture an opinion on Dickens in the presence of Mr. Johnson, but Dickens always was deliberately comic, wasn't he?, when he wasn't deliberately tragic.

Johnson: Well, I don't know that he was deliberately comic; I think that he was just naturally and spontaneously so. To him the normal response to the spectacle of the incongruities of human nature was one of amusement.

Bryson: What about Stevenson's capacity to make Modestine, the little female donkey, seem like a kind of incarnate devil, with a feminine charm of her own? It seems to me one of the real triumphs of the book. And look how cruelly he finally treats Modestine! Can you forgive him?

Johnson: I can very readily.

Bryson: You've traveled with donkeys, Mr. Johnson?

Johnson: It's a cruelty that is called for by the circumstances. When he finds himself confronted with an absolutely immovable animal object in a path, there is nothing whatsoever that he can do except belabor the creature.

Bryson: He does, and it's to no good. I mean, it doesn't do any good to beat a donkey, does it? Modestine just got more firmly fixed in the path.

Johnson: So he takes technological advice on the subject from those who know.

Bryson: Precisely: from the peasant.

Johnson: He discovers the magic word "Proot."

Szamek: Which does no good at all, certainly.

Johnson: It does the first day.

Szamek: Yes, but that's before the donkey comes to her senses. After that it does no good.

Bryson: The donkey realized that he had just learned the word and she didn't really need to pay attention.

Johnson: But then he discovers that a stick with a nail on the end of it is the only real solution.

Bryson: All right, now, the stick with the nail on the end of it—that does two things. That shows the cruel practicality of the peasant; if the donkey won't move, you find a way of piercing the donkey's hide so that he does move. What I'm asking is how it comes that someone so sensitive, so civilized, so poetic as Robert Louis Stevenson could so blithely accept this cruel device for making the donkey move.

Johnson: Well, isn't it that he's also a realist?

Bryson: He's also stuck on a mount.

Szamek: He's a strange sort of man, this Stevenson, a saintly sort of person; there's a deep and high degree of honor in him, almost an untainted chastity of honor. All his life he's devoted to that. And

yet it's strange that he can take pleasure in drinking brandy or sitting on his little mountain top and eating what is undoubtedly the weirdest sandwich in the world, if you remember what it was. He had a combination sandwich of bologna—no, I'll be plebeian—of baloney and chocolate, which is certainly a strange kind of enzyme combination.

Bryson: I've never been able to work up that much appetite—but then I've never climbed the Cévennes, so I don't know what my possibilities might be.

Johnson: Isn't this a part of the gusto which animates this entire book, and which makes it a celebration not merely of a trip through the Cévennes but of the variety and encompassing inclusiveness of human life?

Bryson: Don't weight it down too much, Mr. Johnson.

Johnson: No, I'll try not to be pretentious about it, but I do think that there is a tremendous amount reflected and concentrated in this little book. You recall the way in which, if you put up a gazing globe in the middle of a landscape, you find that it organizes the entire world into a unity. It's reduced to a miniature scale, but everything's there. And in the same way this book, it seems to me, has nature and its bleakness and its commonplaceness and its grandeur; it has human nature in the various people Stevenson encounters and his relations with them, the dour peasants who lock themselves away behind doors and refuse to speak to him, the ones who offer him aid and counsel and companionship, the people whom he encounters at the Trappist monastery with their still vigorous and continuing partisanship. . .

Szamek: In short, he has something to say about everything.

Johnson: Yes.

Szamek: He covers the whole range of human experience, from religion to love, to peasants, to mystics, to women, to donkeys, to waitresses—everything in the world. And he does it with this great, warm charm that only the English have.

Bryson: Let us say the British.

Szamek: Very well: only the cultivated British can be like a nation of intellectual Michael Wildings, which certainly he seems to be here. He's a man of so much charm that you often forget that you were tormented by him quite often in childhood, when you were forced to read his books in school.

Bryson: Before you were ready for them?

Szamek: Before you were ready, and so had them beaten down your throat to the rhythm of a metronome.

Johnson: Well, I'd like to add to the charm, the sheer vividness of response. There isn't anything that Stevenson doesn't feel freshly and sharply and acutely, even when he's doing such an ordinary thing as smoking a cigarette on the side of a hill late at night; he notices that, as he takes each puff, the interior of his palm is lit up by the fluctuating light at the end of the cigarette. Or he will give his response to the donkey by saying that in spite of her appeals, as it were, for his sympathy, his heart remains as cold as a potato. And I can't think of anything at the moment colder than a cold potato.

Bryson: If you have this kind of vivid response and gift of vivid phrase, that's literary power; that's what we mean by it. But in the case of Stevenson I don't think one can overlook the fact that he, who has passed into a kind of decline after being at the very top of the heap, is often accused of being only "literary" in these things. Are these genuine responses, or did he go back and think "Well, now, what shall I say about this that will seem like a very vivid response to a very trivial occasion?" It's not my opinion, I'm quoting.

Johnson: I know. To me they have the effect of genuineness, and, after all, in art the way a thing seems is the way it is. I'm well aware, of course, that Stevenson did himself a considerable amount of damage with the advocates of sheer untutored spontaneity by describing himself as having, in his youth, "played the sedulous ape" to various other authors whose styles he imitated—Hazlitt and Sir Thomas Browne and Charles Lamb and the others. But, in a way, isn't this the manner in which every writer learns to write?

Szamek: The truth is that what we are doing now is trying to skirt gently and delicately around the problem of "What makes an artist?"

Bryson: Let's not be so delicate about it. I asked a while ago what made a trip, taken with the most practical purpose, under a practical compulsion—what made it art?

Szamek: Well, I will answer you. What does it is a well-sandpapered mind, a mind which has been carefully rubbed so that it will receive—like antennae—all the reflections and sounds and colors and movements and rhythms which are around it, and then filters them through its own consciousness and reproduces them with the artist's touch.

Bryson: And the mastery of the artist's materials?

Szamek: Yes, of course. And that, in this case, is his use of words.

Johnson: But Mr. Szamek, isn't one of the ways of sandpapering the mind, to use your own good phrase, precisely that of seeing how other people have done it?

Szamek: No, I don't think so.

Johnson: And adapting for one's self first their tools and then, ultimately, making those tools completely a part of one's own equipment?

Szamek: No, I think this is apprenticeship.

Bryson: But you must go through that?

Szamek: You must always, yes—the strict and stern regimen of apprenticeship. But after that, if you have the basic qualities, it is your own sensitivity which does it, I am sure.

Johnson: Well, that's precisely my point: that if one really is an artist—not just a pastiche imitator—the things that one has learned from other people become a part of one's self and, ultimately, the quite transparent means of expressing whatever one's own individuality sees and experiences.

Bryson: But in the case of Stevenson, who is a great literary problem because of the fluctuations in his reputation, did the marks of his having played the sedulous ape (after all, he invented the phrase) become less and less evident as he went ahead? Did his skills become more and more implicit?

Johnson: I think that anyone who reads, oh, *The Master of Ballantrae* or the unfinished *Weir of Hermiston* is perfectly clear that he did do those things—that, ultimately, the signs of apprenticeship disappeared almost entirely and that you have the mature and developing artist who would have been, if he had not died at forty-five, probably a very great writer indeed.

Szamek: Let me illustrate a point I tried to make a moment ago. Suppose that Stevenson had never written anything for publication but would have been just the man that he was. I recently went through a great many of Stevenson's letters, and it seems to me that letters are the one source in which you really see the soul of a man, if they're not written deliberately for publication, if they're intended for one eye alone. There a man will strip himself naked in his thoughts, and I think that Stevenson does that. His letters exhibit such a tremendous charm that I was very much surprised to discover that this is not only the writer of *Kidnapped* and of *Treasure Island*, but a worldly and charming human being.

Bryson: And that, of course, is the gift that Mr. Johnson was talking about earlier, which shines through the apprenticeship and the devices, the tricks of the trade that a writer learns.

Szamek: It is, but it did him very little good as far as craftsmanship goes, because Stevenson was a man who was extremely popular with women.

Bryson: Do you mean as a man?

Szamek: As a man, but also as an artist. I think that women are inspired by an artist. There's something sadistic in them that makes them happy to have a great talent thrown at their feet, a great genius, a person of fire to say "This is my art, this is my talent, and it is yours." Stevenson did that. His words had magic, his voice had voodoo. Women were quite wild about him. And yet, if you remember, the women in his books are all pale shadows; he could never reproduce them as an artist.

Bryson: That brings up a very practical question: this book was written in order to get money to enable him to marry. Was he happily married to Fanny Osbourne?

Johnson: Well, there are two points of view about that.

Bryson: You mean his and Fanny's?

Johnson: We're not sure.

Szamek: And the biographer's.

Johnson: And the biographer's. Fanny presents their marriage as an extremely happy one, but there seems to be some reason to believe that there was a curious reversal in her presentation of it. She always pictures herself as the sacrificial nurse taking care of an invalid husband, but if you read Stevenson's letters, you find over and over again that he's describing Fanny as ill and himself as taking care of her.

Szamek: Yet it may be that it's part of the saintliness of the man.

Bryson: And also, of course, since Mr. Freud has come into the world in the sixty years since Stevenson died, it may be that Fanny's most subtle way of taking care of him was to be sick herself—so that he'd have to think about her and not about his own illness.

Johnson: It could be that taking care of her was a therapeutic device that made him better. But you're getting into a cosmic phase of feminine psychology that is quite beyond my feeble talents.

Bryson: Well, let's go back to Modestine, who is not cosmic at all, but very feminine. When he got through his journey, however, he'd done something more than anything we've spoken about: he had touched upon French history. He went into that region where the French Protestants fought to the death, literally, against the French Catholics, and since it was the Protestants that he met, he more or less responded to their side of the case. Was that because, being a Scot and a Calvinist by birth, he liked the Protestants better, or were there other reasons?

Johnson: I think there's another reason, as well. What Stevenson admired here was the fact that these French Protestants had not allowed themselves to be bullied and beaten down into changing.

Bryson: They were the underdogs.

Johnson: They were the underdogs, but more than that: they were resistant underdogs. Stevenson himself had experienced the necessity of resistance. His father was a practical business man, a builder of lighthouses who first wanted his son to succeed him in his own business and then, if he would not do that, at least to become something respectable and conventional like a barrister. Stevenson, in his desire to be an artist, simply horrified this conventional old gentleman; he was obliged to put up the strongest kind of resistance in order to follow the career that he wanted to pursue.

Szamek: And became in the process an incorrigible romantic, I suppose.

Johnson: I think that's what really seemed to strike his fancy in this *camisard* business. What happened was that in this little vale, nearly two hundred years before his time, there had been a continual and bloody struggle between the Catholics and the Protestants.

Szamek: And he, I think, was deeply moved by the streak of mysticism in all of this—of the Huguenot forces, for instance, camping out in the fields, not having sentries, but waiting for the angels to guard and protect them. This would strike the fancy of a man like Stevenson.

Bryson: So it's not his Calvinism, it's his poetic sense that was touched?

Johnson: I think so, yes. And the roll of names. Do you remember how often he repeats the names of the leaders? Stevenson's feeling for the picturesqueness of the human past is certainly as strong as his feeling for the picturesqueness of contemporary human nature.

Szamek: Yes, exactly; and he felt a great pity for them, too. It's almost like Voltaire's remark, "Let us reciprocally forgive one another our mutual follies; that is the first law."

Bryson: There's another thing in it, too, I think, and that is that this is part of the man's—well, one doesn't know how self-conscious it was—sense of form. He's going through a very rugged landscape, a landscape which, as I said, doesn't seem to be quite French if one knows only the sunnier parts of France. He finds people who in

ruggedness and resistance, in just sheer, craggy character, are of a piece with this landscape. They make part of his picture.

Szamek: Whenever I've read this book, I've remembered a few lines which are very appropriate from *As You Like It*:

*And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.*

That is what he tried to find; that is what he was certainly looking for.

Johnson: Yes, and in addition to that I think there is the constant emergence of human nature itself. In one of the scenes in the Trappist monastery, he describes the response of one of the monks to a remark of his own as "a kind of ecclesiastical titter." I don't think you could very well cap that for sheer vividness.

Bryson: It's a good illustration of his capacity to take the trivial incident and give it a kind of unforgettable vividness, partly because he feels it so acutely with his sandpapered mind, but also because I think he's a very sedulous artist as well as a "sedulous ape." He wants you to see it as he did.

Johnson: Yes, and the seeing is, of course, a product of the way in which the seeing is represented. It must be a matter of words, and the words have to be concentrated to the greatest degree of intensity and clarity.

Bryson: I've always felt that if I could persuade anybody to go back and read Stevenson, whether he's fashionable or not, I would at least have done that much good in the world.

THEOCRITUS

Poems

(As broadcast August 28, 1955)

MAURICE DOLBIER • ANDRE MICHALOPOULOS • LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: I suppose, in the sense that he wrote about the outdoors, we could call Theocritus a nature poet, although ordinarily we don't think of the Greeks as being much interested in descriptions of nature.

Michalopoulos: Perhaps the poets before Theocritus weren't directly interested in nature, although Aristophanes has quite a lot of very beautiful nature descriptions. However, all of Greek life was out of doors. You had the life in the market place where all the political activity of Athens took place in classical times, the life in the gymnasias with their athletics, the life in the academy where the philosophers discoursed.

Bryson: Perhaps they were so used to life out of doors that they didn't think it was worth talking about. They just took it for granted until the time of Theocritus, which was, after all, pretty late.

Michalopoulos: I think you will find that there was an appreciation of nature, even though it wasn't insisted upon.

Dolbier: While you're speaking of Theocritus as a nature poet, I would like to put forward the proposition that he was also a great poet about *human* nature. In his grottoes, dells, and sylvan glades there were often fewer goddesses than real, breathing people—often working people.

Bryson: And, of course, he did have a good deal to say about what happened in Alexandria, which was hardly a pastoral place. But isn't it a good idea to place this man? After all, he was a Greek poet and yet he wrote in the third century B.C., a long time after what we ordinarily think of as the peak period in Greek literature.

Michalopoulos: Yes, he was pretty far removed from the fifth century B.C., which is generally considered to be the great classical century. He lived in a big city, Alexandria, and a cosmopolitan one. It was the center of the intellectual and business life of the world at that time. There are in the poems excellent descriptions of city life. They are not entirely bucolic.

Bryson: Perhaps he was like a good many modern poets: he preferred to live in a big city while he wrote about rustic scenes that he wouldn't have lived in under any circumstances.

Michalopoulos: Well, I don't know about that. He obviously had a great love of nature.

Bryson: At a distance?

Michalopoulos: No, he must have once lived in the places that he describes. I think there is internal evidence that he lived in the country at some time in his life. We know very little about it, actually. We know that he came from Syracuse in Sicily originally, and that he probably left there as a young man. He spent most of his time in Alexandria. He also lived for a considerable time, again from indirect evidence in the poems, on the island of Cos in the Dodecanese. His nature descriptions do seem to apply to the natural scenery of that island.

Dolbier: He's one of those rare birds among poets—the country boy who can write with exquisite realism about life in the city, and the sophisticated city dweller who can write realistically about life in the country.

Bryson: On what do we base our opinion that he's a poet of the outdoors? There are poets like Shelley who give you grandiose pictures of the outdoors in terms of large abstractions, and then there are poets who really *see* what the birds and bees and plants and flowers and fruits are doing.

Michalopoulos: Theocritus certainly belongs to the latter category. He was intimately acquainted with nature and her down-to-earth manifestations. He loved them, and in interpreting them he became what he is, a very great poet. I would like to read you one piece in translation. It's a very good translation, by Walter Pater, of

a poem which is dedicated to late summer in the country—a day like today, for instance, with beautiful sunshine:

Many poplar and elm trees were waving over our heads, and not far off the running of the sacred water from the cave of the nymphs warbled to us. In the shimmering branches the sunburned grasshoppers were busy with their talk, and from afar the little owl cried softly. Out of the tangled thorns of the blackberry the larks were singing and the hedge-birds and the turtle-doves moaned. The bees flew round and round the fountains, murmuring softly. The scent of late summer and of the fall of the year was everywhere. The pears fell from the trees at our feet, and apples in number rolled down at our sides, and the young plum trees were bent to the earth with the weight of their fruit.

Dolbier: That in itself, I should think, confirms Theocritus as one of the great poets of the world, and not just of classical Greece, or of Alexandrian Greece.

Michalopoulos: Well, there's a realistic knowledge of the country, and it's a kind that seems to have disappeared for many years after Theocritus. Although there were many people who imitated his pastoral style, they imitated it not from spontaneous inspiration but for reasons of their own—for official reasons. Virgil, for instance. Virgil consciously imitates Theocritus, takes his phrases and puts them into Latin hexameters. It is good poetry. It's very beautiful, very well done, but it's completely artificial. The love of nature is lost.

Bryson: Yet we mostly associate Theocritus, don't we, with stories of the love of nymphs and shepherds and things of that sort, rather than with the direct description of nature? That is, his nature is peopled, isn't it?

Michalopoulos: Certainly, his nature is peopled. He has beautiful descriptions of everyday life in the city, for instance. There's that wonderful poem describing two ladies of Alexandria who are going off to the festival of Adonis. You see them in their home, preparing to go out; there's a lot of discussion about what they're going to wear, there's a baby who interferes . . .

Dolbier: Not to mention the stinginess of their husbands.

Bryson: Or the stupidity of their maids!

Michalopoulos: All that is extremely human, extremely vivid, and, I think, extremely good poetry. But it's not country poetry—it's description of city life.

Bryson: It goes back to Mr. Dolbier's point: that this man included human nature in nature, and when he wanted to describe people living in a great metropolis he was just as good as when he was describing people living under the fruit trees.

Dolbier: It was also Theocritus' own description of his work. In one of the poems with which he paid, or attempted to gain, a patron he says: "Goddesses are the muses and goddesses sing of God, but we on earth are mortal men, so of men let us sing." There's also an

epigram which is probably anonymous but might have been written by him: "I, Theocritus, who wrote these songs, am of Syracuse, a man of the people." Is that one of the rare examples in classical Greece of a poet describing himself as a man of the people?

Michalopoulos: Well, I daresay it's fairly rare, although that raises another question as to who were "the people" in classical Greece. But Theocritus wrote popular poetry. He considered himself to be a man of the people and he understood them. Even in his more epic poems, such as the one about the infancy of Hercules where he strangles the serpents, you have extraordinarily pleasant domestic scenes of the popular sort. The infant Hercules is in his crib, the snakes crawl up, and he strangles them. He has a younger brother, Iphicles, who yells and shrieks until his parents, Alcmene and Amphitryon, wake up. Alcmene, being a practical mother and wife, says: "Get up! Get up at once, Amphitryon! I'm scared. Get up and don't waste time putting on your sandals. Can't you hear how loudly the baby is shrieking?" Well, there you have in the middle of what is an epic poem, glorifying an exploit of the infant Hercules, this little human touch straight out of everyday life.

Dolbier: We've discussed Theocritus as a writer about nature, as a man who tried his hand at the epic, and as a man who could write brilliantly comic domestic scenes. I think it might also be said that he wrote one of the greatest—one critic has called it *the* greatest—love poem in any language.

Michalopoulos: I presume you're referring to the poem about Simaetha?

Dolbier: Yes.

Michalopoulos: The girl who is jilted in love. What happened was that she saw a very beautiful young man, or at least she thought he was beautiful . . .

Bryson: That usually suffices!

Michalopoulos: Indeed. She saw him in the arena, where he was engaged in sports, and sent her maid to tell him how well he had acquitted himself and to ask him to come round and see her. He does go round. He pretends that he was coming anyhow because he had seen how beautiful she was. Things develop, and then he leaves her. Afterwards she reflects on this pleasant incident in her life, and becomes annoyed at the fact that she has been abandoned. And so she resorts to magic. She takes a little wheel, puts a wax image of the young man on it, and spins the wheel in order to get him to come back.

Bryson: Well, now, this voodoo doesn't change the fact that we have a love poem here—a poem about the essential nature of the passion of love. It's not a description of love as a great cosmic event, it's a . . .

Michalopoulos: Oh, no, no! It is entirely Greek and down-to-earth. The Greeks didn't get themselves up in the clouds over love; they looked on it as a human thing that happens to everybody. They didn't idealize it or make it nebulous as have so many writers since.

Bryson: They didn't make it romantic?

Michalopoulos: No, not at all, but they made it very beautiful—and I'm going to show you how Theocritus does it. The girl is talking:

And I, all too easily persuaded, took him by the hand and bent him back upon the soft couch, and quickly body warmed to body and our faces burned hotter than before and we whispered sweetly . . . Then, dear Moon, to make the story short, love's greatest deed was done and we both came to fulfillment of our desire.

Now that is perfectly beautiful, much more beautiful in Greek than in the English translation, because I think English is perhaps associated with a certain amount of puritanism that tends to diminish the complete naturalness of the Greek.

Bryson: And innocence, in the real sense.

Michalopoulos: It's perfectly direct.

Dolbier: And that poem, which contains so much passion and so much magic in its earlier portions, closes with some lines that bring the thing to earth:

Farewell, Lady, and turn thy steeds toward the ocean, and I will bear my longing as till now I have endured it. Moon on thy gleaming throne, farewell! And farewell, ye other stars that follow the car of quiet night.

Michalopoulos: Yes, it's absolutely wonderful. It's rather like an ending in Homer. The Greeks always liked to end in a minor key, to end on a note of peace and quiet.

Bryson: It seems to me you're both saying that the reputation Theocritus has among people who don't read him—a reputation as a gentle, vaguely mythological writer who talked about shepherds piping in the sunshine—is completely inadequate, because the man had great tragic and emotional power.

Michalopoulos: He certainly had that kind of power. Even when he talks about his shepherds and shepherdesses, they are not the shepherds and shepherdesses of eighteenth-century French poetry and painting. They are real human beings whom he had seen in the country and with whom he had sat under a tree.

Dolbier: Theocritus had another talent that we may as well mention now and get it over with. There's a sort of companion piece to the beautiful poem about Simaetha. It opens with a dialog between two men, one of whom has lost his mistress. She's fallen in love with a wolf, really a wolf. Her new friend is called Lykos.

Michalopoulos: Meaning "Wolf."

Dolbier: Exactly. It's a very humorous and interesting poem, and in it Theocritus shows his ability at writing what I hope I may be forgiven for describing as a sneaky radio commercial. He winds up with one man asking the other, "What are you going to do?" He replies: "I don't know, I'm heartbroken." Says the first: "Why don't you join the Egyptian army? Ptolemy, the king, is a good paymaster." And it goes on exactly like a recruiting slogan.

Bryson: Why does he go on that way? Is it because he's taking an opportunity here, a little extraneously, to drag in a favorable reference to Ptolemy? After all, he owes Ptolemy a good deal as a patron and wants to praise him—or does it have some dramatic interest in the poem itself? I don't know.

Michalopoulos: It's rather difficult to say. He was obviously

trying to get a patron. He had already tried at one time to get the patronage of Hieron II, Tyrant of Syracuse, and had apparently failed. Then, like a great many poets of antiquity, he turned to Ptolemy. There's a certain amount of self-interest in it. Also, no doubt, he was attracted by life in Alexandria, which was at its height then. It was a great life in a great city, and he was probably impelled by a natural desire to praise the reign of a great prince. He *was* a great prince. Ptolemy Philadelphus was one of the great kings of Egypt.

Bryson: But here his attitude toward love seems to be different from what it was in the poem about the girl who practiced sorcery. Perhaps it's because he is talking about another man's sorrows; in the first poem he was reproducing the girl's own feeling.

Michalopoulos: Yes. In the one, he's describing the character of an emotional girl; in the other case, he's describing a drinking party where we have a scene of jealousy.

Dolbier: Perhaps the real companion piece to the Simaetha poem is not this one, but—well, there are really two poems. One is better than the other, I think, and the better one is *The Cyclops*.

Michalopoulos: Yes.

Dolbier: Another idyl of unrequited love, but this time told with passion and charm.

Michalopoulos: I have a translation of it. Trevelyan's translation, actually. Although perhaps not the *best* translator, Trevelyan is very good and his complete translation of Theocritus is easily obtainable here.

Bryson: Yes, he may be the easiest to find.

Michalopoulos: There are a good many translations. There's Jack Lindsay and Walter Pater, to name two. That passage I read before in Pater's translation is absolutely beautiful, but I don't think he's done the whole of Theocritus.

Bryson: Would you say that these translators give a person who doesn't read Greek a sense of the power and beauty in Theocritus' poetry?

Michalopoulos: A lot of it is lost, of course.

Bryson: That's inevitable.

Michalopoulos: Inevitable. All Greek poetry is really completely untranslatable, but Trevelyan is very adequate and he has done this piece charmingly. It's about the Cyclops Polyphemus who is in love with Galatea, a sea-nymph. This is what Theocritus says:

See you not, Polyphemus, how Galatea is pelting your flock with apples? Fool in love, she calls you, a goatherd clown, yet no glance will you give her. Hard of heart! But still you sit piping so sweetly. [He is now playing hard to get.] Then, again, look how she pelts your dog, the faithful guardian of your sheep. Into the sea he peers and barks, while in the pretty waves that splash so tranquilly his image is reflected as he runs upon the sand. [That's lovely—the little dog running on the sand and barking at his reflection in the waves.] Take good care or else he'll leap right at the maiden's legs as she comes from the sea and rend her fair flesh with his

teeth. See how she stands coquetting there, light as the dry wind's seeds blown from a thistle in the lovely summer's noonday heat. If a man love, she flies him. If he love not, she pursues.

Dolbier: Alexandria at this period was a city where science and criticism were at their height, rather than original creative poetry. It reminds me somewhat of our own civilization here in New York, where we, like Alexandria, have one of the great libraries of the world, and have innumerable critics writing innumerable texts on other people's work.

Bryson: We also have innumerable poets coming to Cos from Syracuse, which I suppose might be . . .

Dolbier: Syracuse, New York. Or perhaps Utica.

Bryson: Not to mention South Dakota and Missouri. And I suppose we might equate Cos with Westchester county.

Dolbier: But in the midst of all this science and criticism, the appearance of Theocritus was a miracle.

Bryson: And that's important, if one is interested in the relation between a civilization and its poetry. Here's one of the great lyric poets of the world, undoubtedly. Was he alone? Did nobody else appear?

Michalopoulos: Oh, yes; there was Apollonius Rhodius.

Bryson: But does the best judgment put him on a par with Theocritus?

Michalopoulos: Oh, I think so. As a matter of fact, they engaged in a literary quarrel on matters of style. For instance, Callimachus and Theocritus both agreed that the epic, when it was treated as Theocritus does in the Hercules poems, should be short—it should just give an episode or two and get them over with—while Apollonius Rhodius thought that you could repeat epics of the length of Homer's. He did so in his *Argonautica*, and very beautifully. There was a long-drawn-out quarrel between the two schools of thought, but they were all poets of merit. The third book of the *Argonautica*, which describes the passion of Medea for Jason, is among the greatest poetry in the world; and Callimachus is also a first-rate lyrical poet.

Dolbier: The Alexandrians, and Theocritus principally among them, have a long life still ahead of them, I think. In every civilization, and in ours at the moment, there is always a minority of people who would willingly exchange the prospect of two cars in every garage for one of a nymph in every grotto.

Bryson: But the difficulty with nymphs is that you can't turn them out on an assembly line in Detroit.

Michalopoulos: And where in New York would you find a grotto?

Bryson: Nevertheless, I think that Theocritus isn't so far removed in spirit from the poets of today, who—as he did—live in great centers of science and criticism and scholarship, but continue to think about the loveliness of nature.

THOMAS HENRY HUXLEY

Man's Place in Nature

(As broadcast September 4, 1955)

JAMES K. FEIBLEMAN • JONATHAN LEONARD • LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: We usually think of books on nature as being quiet havens into which people can retreat to find peace of mind, but Huxley wrote a book about nature that got him into a lot of trouble.

Leonard: It was nearly a hundred years ago, in 1863, and in those days you could get into a real mess by saying that man is related to the animals; people just didn't like the idea of having any connection whatever with monkeys. By now they've gotten used to it, but it was a shocking idea ninety years ago.

Bryson: But it wasn't a new idea even then.

Leonard: Oh, by no means. A lot of people had already had it. And it's pretty obvious; if you look at a monkey with the proper insight, you'll see that he isn't too different from some of your friends.

Feibleman: Yes, but for a long time people had been led to believe that there was a very sharp distinction between them. The notion that man was an animal like a horse or a gorilla—and I think in this case *especially* a gorilla—was too shocking to accept.

Leonard: One thing that made it difficult, I think, is the Biblical account of Creation, where animals were created as Class B citizens of the world and human beings were created on an entirely different plane.

Feibleman: Yes; in view of all the distance between a fallen angel and a risen ape, the idea that these were one and the same was too startling.

Bryson: But, of course, Huxley's position as a scientist—and he had, in his own right, a substantial eminence as a scientist—was not as the inventor or supporter of this theory, but as a debater about it. We have to relate him to Darwin, whose cause he took up.

Feibleman: Darwin was really the big man of the pair. He was the one who first discovered, or at least who first established, natural selection as the principle of evolution.

Bryson: Let's be quite clear about this: the idea of evolution was old; many scientists and philosophers had believed it for centuries, and yet Darwin discovered the machinery by which it was achieved.

Feibleman: Yes, the mechanism of chance selection—that chance operates in favor of those who are best equipped to cope with their environment. This theory of natural selection was Darwin's contribution, and Huxley's chief fame lay in supporting and defending it in fields of his own choosing.

Leonard: Darwin was a rather tiring character, I think. He was

a man of means who sat back in a comfortable country estate near London; he was a hypochondriac—always in ill health or thinking he was . . .

Bryson: Same thing, Mr. Leonard.

Leonard: Yes, I suppose it is; you can make yourself sick if you think you are. He wrote a lot of letters, but he didn't climb up on the platform and attack bishops or other people who defied him with the Book of Genesis.

Feibleman: Those are the facts, but it seems to me that one can read them in another way. A recent critic of Darwin and Huxley has done so. William Irvine says that Darwin really had a sort of strategic hypochondria: it is easier to pull the strings if you stay behind the scenes. It's true that he did have minor ailments, a good many of them, and a comfortable income—but he also had a very shrewd mind. And so he sat back and maneuvered the players on the stage at the Scientific Association meetings.

Leonard: Yes, he didn't even go to the meetings. He would start one of these arguments and then sit back in his comfortable country place and wait for the explosion.

Bryson: Are you gentlemen taking the halo off Darwin as a saint of science?

Feibleman: I don't think there are any saints of science, although there are some heroes.

Bryson: He's a *hero* of science?

Feibleman: He's a hero, yes.

Bryson: But this shrewdness is quite apart from his greatness as an observer, and as a rational accumulator of facts.

Leonard: I think the job of getting ideas known is a terribly important one. I would rate it only a little lower than having the ideas in the first place.

Bryson: Darwin did both.

Feibleman: A great many ideas have come to men and have been exposed in places where nobody reads them; they lie dormant for a long, long time and do no one any good. That's a very sad thing when it happens, and Darwin took no chances whatever on having it happen to his ideas.

Bryson: Well, Huxley readily accepted his role, didn't he? I think at one time he called himself "Darwin's bulldog." He didn't mind going out and lecturing audiences; he didn't mind having arguments with bishops.

Leonard: Huxley, you know, is a pretty extraordinary character in his own right. This was, as we were saying earlier, a group of giants. Huxley was not only a scientist himself, but also a superb platform performer, evidently. He knew how to make these great ideas simple and to present them forcefully. And, of course, he was a wonderful debater. He could sit back and listen to somebody taking an opposite point of view, and select a few little statements that could be used to reduce his opponent to a pulp. He did it over and over again, and really established the Darwinian hypothesis by making ridiculous the people who opposed him.

Bryson: But he must have been more than a good debater. He not

only advanced Darwin's ideas but offered a good many himself. In this book, *Man's Place in Nature*, Huxley gives what I've always supposed to be a pretty good summary of paleontological knowledge at that time.

Leonard: Extraordinarily good. Darwin didn't touch on man very much. He had worked with barnacles and earthworms and striped horses and things like that, and he had kind of avoided man. But Huxley didn't care a bit and barged right in. He starts off with the very slight knowledge of the great apes that they had in those days, and the even slighter knowledge of fossil man, but he comes out with something that compares pretty well with our present knowledge, which is very great and detailed.

Feibleman: Yes. I don't know how much of this was deliberate, but he certainly did pick for his illustrations animals that are more understandable to the average man than those Darwin picked.

Bryson: And more interesting.

Feibleman: More interesting, too. He compared man with the great apes—that's primarily what he did in this book. He said that there were human characteristics in some of the great apes, and he dwelt on them for a long time. Then he showed, or tried to show, that man is closer to the gorilla than the gorilla is to the gibbon. Of course, since then we've come to believe that both are derived from some third species.

Bryson: What Huxley did was to take this thesis of Darwin's, which had to do with nature in general, and make it exciting, sensational, and, in a sense, offensive—because he started the whole row over whether man is "related to the monkey."

Leonard: Yes, but I don't think he ever went wrong to the extent of saying that we were descended from monkeys.

Bryson: He never said just that?

Leonard: He never said it, and I don't think he thought it was so. He just didn't know at that time what we know now—that there were a great many species in the past more or less like man and more or less like monkeys, and that we're descended from one of them.

Feibleman: He entered fields of comparative anatomy and embryology and paleontology that Darwin hadn't fooled with.

Leonard: Darwin was not an anatomist at all, but Huxley was trained as a doctor and was a very good anatomist, one of the greatest of his time.

Bryson: With all this tremendous excitement—thunderings from the pulpit, politicians reading these men out of the human race, and so on—why is it that nobody went to the stake, nobody got hanged, nobody got exiled? In other places, much closer to us than Victorian England, you couldn't be that heretical and get away with it.

Leonard: You can't now. I would like to credit the British people, who are wonderful in that respect. This was an intellectual controversy and nobody called the cops. Nobody was really hurt. I think there were a lot of hurt feelings, but that's about all. In other countries—well, in our own state of Tennessee there was trouble.

Feibleman: I agree with you. When histories of peaceful change are written, England has to be featured; it's the very best model. The

English have proved that you really can settle problems of this sort without shedding blood.

Bryson: This seems to me worth looking at for a moment, because England was then, as it is now, a country with a state church. The church officially opposed this theory, although without doubt many clergymen as individuals were on Darwin's and Huxley's side.

Feibleman: Official religion doesn't necessarily mean official opinions. The English tradition is that controversy should be free, and that a man should be able to speak his mind if he's a serious worker in a serious field, which certainly Darwin and Huxley were. And I think the answer to it is that reason was put before anything else . . .

Bryson: In that culture at that time.

Feibleman: In that culture at that time; and, as I say, it's a model of an enlightened attitude. All arguments or debates, no matter how serious or fundamental, can be submitted to the authority of reason and fact rather than to any single institution or individual.

Bryson: You think that this is one of the occasions on which the British proved that?

Feibleman: I do.

Leonard: I think the British have proved it a good many times, and I hope they get the opportunity to prove it many times more. They have never allowed any institution to grow up within their society that could exert authority, other than the state itself.

Bryson: Not since the seventeenth century, at any rate.

Leonard: We have an example right now, in our modern world, of a very similar controversy that has gone the other way: the Russian controversy over the genetic theories of Lysenko. The Communist party is an authoritarian semi-religion of a sort; it has established the Lysenko doctrine as the only one—absolutely wrong though it is—and enforced it and allowed no comeback.

Feibleman: To go back to this book, it seems to me that Huxley takes for granted something that very few have ever taken for granted before him: that science is one of the great human endeavors, akin to religion and art and philosophy. It is one of civilization's superb institutions. Before Huxley I don't think it was common to look on it as an institution; it was a limited endeavor by a few men, and it didn't have stature in the sense that religion, art, and philosophy have had stature for centuries. Underneath his main point, which is the controversial defense of Darwin's doctrine of evolution, the tone of this book somehow communicates the assumption that science is a great institution.

Bryson: Is that why it's a great book?

Feibleman: That's *only* why it's a great book. After all the controversy is over, there's no reason to read a popularizing classic such as this.

Leonard: I think you're entirely right about that. Huxley talked about evolution, but he also talked about an awful lot of other things. Most of this book was meant to be spoken, not read. On the lecture platform he described scientific habits of thought—how you judge by the evidence, how you generalize on the basis of facts that point to a theory—and he made them understandable by taking very simple

examples. He showed up the ridiculousness and the danger of other habits of thought—of accepting the opinions of others, letting them become fossilized, and holding on to them like grim death, all of which is the sign of a declining culture.

Bryson: Mr. Leonard, if these essays came to you today, would you as an editor take them?

Leonard: Well, I have an average of about a thousand words a week to play with in the columns of *Time* and I just couldn't get away with Huxley's length. People could take more intellectual punishment in those days.

Bryson: What about the density?

Leonard: It's pretty dense, too. Huxley used popular phrases, but he also used a great many technical terms that I know I couldn't get away with.

Feibleman: It seems to me that one of the other values of this book is that Huxley not only gives the conclusions, but, more importantly for the lay reader, he explains how these conclusions were arrived at. Now I see very little of this type of popularization going on today. Most of the popular accounts of science that I read deal only with the conclusions and what they could mean to people; very few scientific popularizers give us the mental processes by which the scientists arrived at those conclusions.

Leonard: I always try to do that if I can, within the limitations of space. I try to show the steps by which the man arrived at his conclusions.

Bryson: Isn't that what Mr. Feibleman meant by saying that Huxley had made a great institution out of science? Science is not a great institution only because it's a body of important knowledge, it's a great institution because it's a way of approaching the problems of life.

Leonard: Yes, I think that's better; I don't think it's an *institution*, but a way to think. There are other ways of thinking, such as reading ancient books and accepting the opinions that have been handed down from generation to generation, but they seem to me wrong. When science is free and unsuppressed, the normal way to think is the scientific way.

Bryson: What worries me, though, is the fear that science with its immense technological development could become a new kind of authoritarianism in our culture.

Leonard: Oh, I don't think the word "institution" necessarily means authoritarianism . . .

Feibleman: I didn't mean that kind of institution, either. What I mean is a formal and rational discipline that we call the scientific method. I don't think it comes naturally to a human being, in the sense that anybody can practice it without training. I do think it's natural in the sense that it calls on us to use all our faculties together; our experience works together with our reasoning powers. And the conclusions are not necessarily final, because science is always trying to improve its findings and generally succeeds in doing so from time to time. But it's this common enterprise of working in a certain way according to a certain commonly agreed-upon method—holding on to

the method rather than to its conclusions—that seems to me we can dignify with the name “institution.”

Leonard: There's not much danger of scientists becoming authoritarian. I've known lots of them, and the best ones are always eager for new ideas. What they love best to see is the young graduate student who stands up and says the great professor is wrong—and proves it. That's exactly the opposite of what happens in fields where you have institutional thought.

Feibleman: I don't think the scientists are in any danger of becoming authoritarians, because as soon as they do they cease to be scientists. But there are others who do it for them; I regret to say that some of my own number, philosophers, do this.

Leonard: There are also a lot of bum scientists who aren't really scientists at all, but scientific administrators or politicians or wanglers or angle-characters. I've known a lot of them, too.

Bryson: It seems to me this danger has two aspects, though. What Mr. Feibleman has just said is perfectly true: the danger is not in the scientist, who is trained not to be authoritarian, but that in his name people will use his findings to stifle all questions. On the other hand, there are people who say that since science is only tentative in its conclusions, it cannot be truth at all.

Feibleman: Oh, I think that's a very weak argument indeed.

Bryson: But it is made.

Feibleman: I'm sure of that. Lots of weak arguments are made. But the weakness of that argument is that it assumes that truth is necessarily an absolute—that we attain it immediately and know it finally and don't have to do anything more about it. It seems to me the nature of scientific truth is that we can approach it continually, always getting closer and closer; the tiny steps we take toward it are a lot more valuable than arriving at something immediately by another, perhaps fallacious, method.

Bryson: And Huxley makes you feel that?

Feibleman: I think so. He saw himself, you know, as a revolutionist in the good sense of that word. He said he was a publicist for the scientific revolution; by this he meant not the overthrow of any government or of any way of life, but merely an improvement on all fronts by what you might call the humble and silent method of science.

Leonard: Europe at that time, and especially Britain, was in the process of tremendous change; they were changing their habits of thought; they were not looking back to the past for knowledge and for things to admire, but into the future.

Bryson: I think you both said earlier that this book is not a classic, because no scientific book can be a classic, but now you've pretty well established its classic character.

Feibleman: Let me say that I have tried to establish the classic features of a book which, *in toto*, is not a classic. Science keeps moving forward; no matter how good a scientific treatise is in its own day, if science is any good that book will be superseded. In this sense, I think rating scientific books as classics in the same way as literary classics is somewhat misleading. But I do think that in this particular book there is extremely valuable material of a lasting nature. Huxley's

whole attitude toward science—the institutional aspects of it, the dignity of the field of science—is presented in an extremely able way and gives it the color of a classic.

Leonard: A classic is usually a book that's been admired for a long time and is assigned as compulsory reading to students. When a scientific book reaches that advanced age, there's usually enough new knowledge to make it obsolete. And I think that what Mr. Feibleman said about there being no classics of science is pretty well true. There are books, however, that you can look back to as landmarks in the development of science . . .

Bryson: And read them now, or just know about them?

Leonard: Read them now with some provisos. In the case of a man like Huxley, you can read them pretty safely. You won't get much misinformation, because Huxley, when he came to an area where the data were incomplete, always said so. He said so quite carefully. He did not say that we were descended from monkeys, he said that we just don't know what the actual history was. And he was right; we don't know yet, actually.

Feibleman: I think it's very important to say that if you were giving a course in the history of science, you would have to mention this book. You'd have to mention it in connection with Darwin, and certainly you would have to mention Darwin. Therefore Huxley has a place, and this book has a place, in the permanent history of science. But what impresses me about Huxley is that he was not just a popularizer. I was very surprised to discover that Huxley is credited with having been the first man to introduce laboratory work in the teaching of biology. I must confess that how biology could be taught *without* laboratory work is almost inconceivable . . .

Leonard: The answer to that, I think, is that it wasn't taught in any rational way. As a result, there were very few people who understood biology.

Bryson: You say that in this book Huxley's attitude continues to have a hold on our attention even though the content, because it's been passed by, no longer does. Well, the same thing could be said of Thackeray, who was his contemporary. We don't any longer take the manners and morals of early Victorian England as authoritative or even interesting, but we *read* Thackeray.

Feibleman: In that sense, of course, it's permanent. But our knowledge has moved on. Science now believes that the mechanism of evolution is genetic mutation and genetic inheritance. This had been discovered by Mendel, but it was only touched on by these fellows.

Leonard: It amazes me, though, that Huxley and Darwin could come so very close to what we believe is the mechanism of evolution without understanding the Mendelian theory of genetics, which is a complicated and rather unlikely mechanism. Nevertheless, they did pretty well for the time.

Feibleman: Didn't they really lack the instruments to make those discoveries? They couldn't have been made then.

Leonard: That's right.

Feibleman: But they have been made since, and in that sense we know more today about evolution than Darwin did, or Huxley.

Leonard: A great deal more, but we haven't learned anything that wholly invalidates the Darwinian theory.

Bryson: What you gentlemen have said, it seems to me, is that we know more about evolution than these men did, but we don't know as much about the dignity of untrammelled and courageous thought following the scientific method to whatever conclusion it may come to.

SARAH ORNE JEWETT

The Country of the Pointed Firs

(As broadcast September 11, 1955)

KENNETH GOULD • VIRGILIA PETERSON • LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: If we would call Sarah Orne Jewett a nature writer, we'd have to say a nature writer most interested in people—one who seems to make people part of the landscape, or perhaps landscape a part of the character of her people.

Gould: Anyone who has known and loved the coast of Maine could never be immune to the appeal of Sarah Orne Jewett. She was such a delightful person, and such a skillful and charming writer, that one feels almost disloyal to suggest that she might have had some limitations.

Peterson: I think you left out the adjective "moving," Mr. Gould. It's surprising, really, that a person who writes about people so remote from modern life, so remote from everything in the current American scene, can nevertheless manage to bring a lump to your throat every time she wants to.

Bryson: It's really extraordinary that in these days, when everything has to be advertised as raw emotion, she can so quietly steal up on you.

Peterson: She doesn't *mind* decorum. Oh, how wonderful it would be to reinstate decorum in life! These people have so much self-mastery and control; they may be called inhibited by psychiatrists, but I'm all for inhibitions when they're like that.

Gould: Her emotions were never raw; they are there underneath, but controlled all the time.

Bryson: In this collection, particularly, she takes people in whose lives almost nothing happens—and yet a great deal happens to them.

Peterson: Nothing happens in the modern sense. None of them has been murdered or murders other people, but a great deal happens because they are extraordinarily sensitive people underneath and living rather fiercely. One thinks of New England as having a dead-pan poker face, but she herself speaks of the fires of the New England nature: "When, at long intervals, the altars to patriotism, to friend-

ship, to the ties of kindred, are reared in familiar fields, then the fires glow, the flames come up as if from the inexhaustible burning heart of the earth; the primal fires break through the granite dust in which our souls are set." You realize that there's immense emotional power underneath these absolutely sober, absolutely quiet people, with their vast self-control and almost inarticulate manner.

Gould: Could I make the rather impolite remark that *The Country of the Pointed Firs* is not really a novel at all?

Bryson: I don't think it was meant to be. And, anyway, does it matter?

Gould: No, except that it may have an effect on the modern generation of readers. There is no sense of plot here. Miss Jewett is utterly innocent of plot. She intended only to delve into a group of characters, and in order to do so she wrote a number of detached, almost independent sketches, episodes, or vignettes about people, some of whom are not essential to the development of the central group.

Bryson: You can start right out with her landlady. The device is a familiar one: she went to this Maine fishing village as a summer visitor and lived with Mrs. Todd.

Peterson: Mrs. Almira Todd.

Gould: *Almiry*, if you please!

Peterson: Yes, *Almiry*. Would you say just past middle age? At any rate, a widow who has a very small sustenance and makes enough money to live on by collecting herbs and ministering to the ailments of the community.

Bryson: But she has a very strong conscience about that; if she thinks they're really sick she sends them to the doctor.

Gould: She was not a quack. She had a very sound relationship with the village doctor, and she herself had a natural instinct for what was healthy and what was good.

Peterson: The only thing I believe she said the herbs wouldn't do was to fix up people who thought they had something the matter with them and didn't.

Bryson: But you'd think they would have been her normal clientele, the people who weren't really sick. But she didn't fool herself about that. She thought there were certain things that nature's simple remedies could help, and so she used them.

Gould: One of the few unifying elements in the book is the narrator, a writer who has spent her summer vacations in this village over a period of two or three years—obviously Sarah Orne Jewett herself. She boards at Mrs. Todd's home and gets to know the other members of Mrs. Todd's family: Mrs. Blackett, her mother, eighty-seven years old, a widow who lives in peace out on Green Island, one of the offshore islands; and her brother William, himself almost sixty, a fisherman. These two live on the island, and Almira. . .

Peterson: *Almiry*, Mr. Gould!

Gould: . . . And *Almiry* at Dunnet Landing, this little fishing village on the eastern coast of Maine. These three people, the Blackett family, are the important characters. The others are merely sketches that assist in building up a feeling of the environment and of the type of people that live there. The interaction between the people and

the landscape is beautifully done throughout the book. Do you feel that?

Peterson: Yes. Mrs. Todd is not an ordinary landlady in any sense. Although the author apparently has gone there to write, she finds it inordinately difficult to get down to work because she's so interested in Mrs. Todd and her goings-on. She finally takes refuge in a little schoolhouse where she has a wonderful view of the harbor and where she tries to work, but she seems to be continually looking out the window, hoping someone has climbed the hill to "come and tell her something more." Her feeling for these people is really very warm and deep, even though the friendship between them remains unspoken.

Bryson: That's one of her most extraordinary achievements—that she makes this idea of deep, controlled passion thoroughly convincing. When lesser authors try to do that, you are convinced either about the passion or about the decorum, but seldom about both.

Gould: Most of these people are elderly, living alone, a little isolated, a little left-behind by life and the declining economy. They really have not had a chance to live, in our sense, and their chief joy is in knowing each other's lives intimately down to the last detail.

Bryson: How, then, is Miss Jewett so successful in making you feel the full dignity and significance of these lives? It *is* a backwater; the shipping industry is gone, only fishing and scrub farming are left. How does she succeed in making these people, caught in a backwater, so significant?

Peterson: I don't think the magnitude or the scope of a life is important. If you have a born writer, it has nothing to do with it. She gets down to the very bottom; she plumbs the last depths of these people. Whether they're living in a backwater or not, they're brothers and sisters to all of us. The vast common denominator of human nature and human suffering is the note that she strikes over and over again like a bell.

Gould: The visitor gradually learns about these people, is received into their midst, becomes accepted by them. She learns, for instance, about Captain Littlepage, a retired sea captain and a lover of great poetry, but a man who, through unfortunate circumstances, had lost his ship and is living in his memories of the past. He talks about some marvelous, ghostly village far up in the Arctic, where the lives of sailors remained in limbo until they could enter paradise. . .

Bryson: Which makes the villagers think he's a bit touched.

Gould: He *is* a bit touched. And she admits it. But all of them have their own little pasts, of which they have preserved the essence in their own immediate surroundings. You remember Captain Elijah Tilley, another of these retired fishermen. . .

Peterson: Yes. He is a lonely widower who never has got over the loss of his "poor dear," as he calls his late wife.

Bryson: But how exquisitely he worships her memory through his housekeeping!

Peterson: Yes, it's very touching—keeping everything just the way she would have had it. And the only secret that had ever lain between them was the broken cup, one of the few French cups they

had; she'd been ashamed to admit that one of them was chipped and they found it after she was dead, tucked away in the back of the closet.

Gould: A most delightful story.

Peterson: But not to be compared, in my opinion, with the one called *Poor Joanna*.

Bryson: There you will find a completely different dimension.

Peterson: There you move into something that has an eternal quality, like a statue. It could be true of any time in history, of any country, because it's the story of a broken-hearted woman who was jilted at the last moment and could not recover sufficiently to go on living in the community. Perhaps she should have had enough courage to make herself useful and go through life in spite of her disappointment, but she was one of those who are too deeply hurt. Ballads and popular poetry throughout the world are filled with such people.

Bryson: Joanna goes off to Shell-heap Island and lives there entirely alone for the rest of her life.

Gould: She's almost like a figure in Greek tragedy.

Peterson: The wonderful part of it is that the community regretted her withdrawal deeply, but accepted it. They forgot her a bit as the years went by, but there were always some faithful friends who sailed past the island and threw on shore, so that she could find them, chicken coops with hens in them or useful kitchen utensils—little things to help her in the bleak existence she had chosen. They didn't think of her as somebody they could let die and forget.

Gould: But does the story of Joanna Todd have any real relation to the central theme of the Blackett family?

Peterson: None whatever.

Gould: She was a Todd, true enough—a cousin of Almiry Todd's husband, but that was all.

Peterson: Mrs. Todd sailed out to the island once with a minister. That is a wonderful scene. The minister, in Mrs. Todd's opinion, wasn't worth very much. . .

Gould: He was "well-meanin'", but very numb in his feelin's."

Bryson: You read that with the g's left off. Is this real Maine speech? I don't know.

Gould: Oh, this is real Maine. I believe that some people might call Miss Jewett a dialect writer, but obviously she isn't using dialect in the ordinary sense of the term. She's very sparing in the formation of her words and her pronunciations. She allows these people a certain number of the common grammatical errors of old New England folk: "be" for is, "ain't," double negatives, and so on. They're all there, but they're not obtrusive. What she does do, and what she does so supremely well, is to use the unique and characteristic idioms of old Yankee speech—often pithy, witty, dry, inspired by the familiar activities of their lives on sea or land. I'd like to give you a few samples of them.

Bryson: Go ahead.

Gould: I could go on forever. When the visitor walks down the hill with old Captain Littlepage and takes his arm, Mrs. Todd sees her and says: "I see you sleevin' the old gentleman down the hill."

When they don't like somebody particularly well, and would just as soon avoid them, they say: "There she goes now, do let's pray her by!"

Peterson: And they also use wonderful images, concerned, of course, with the country around them, but so meaningful. There's an old lady named Mrs. Peet, in one of the subsequent stories, who has been thrown out of her home by a wicked nephew. When she's leaving for Shrewsbury, where she will have to live from now on, she says: "You might as well set out one o' my old apple-trees on the beach, so't could see the waves come in." That's how much she's going to get out of the new town, but it's a beautiful image.

Gould: Or "I'm willin' to own a relation that has such proper ideas as doughnuts." There is this one that I'm *master* fond of: "The Lord's seen reason at last an' removed Mis' Cap'n Hight. . ."

Bryson: Now that brings us right back to the main story, which is William's love story, isn't it?

Gould: That is the main story.

Bryson: It's the old story: love. The discovery of its meaning on the part of the narrator is very slow, but it's very moving when you get to it.

Gould: At last he is able to marry Esther Hight, the shepherdess, who had cared for her paralyzed mother on one of those upland farms for forty years.

Bryson: And for forty years they had been in love!

Gould: For forty years William had gone up to see the Hights once a year, using as his excuse a summer trout-fishing expedition.

Peterson: Do you remember when the narrator finally realized what was going on? William came by one day and said he was going trout fishing. His sister, Almiry Todd, smeared his face with some hideous lotion to repel mosquitoes, and then the narrator went off with him. Only after fishing all morning did they go up to the Hight farm to call on the paralyzed old lady. William disappeared in search of Esther and left the visitor to cope with the old lady for what seemed to be hours and hours. The old lady thought that William hadn't been able to find her daughter, but when the visitor went to the door, there they were—sitting on the fence with rapt expressions of joy, surrounded by the sheep. Later on, when the cat was finally out of the bag, the narrator asked Mrs. Todd how on earth she could have smeared up William's face like that when she knew where he was going. Mrs. Todd said: "Darlin', he's got a beautiful shaped face, and they pison him very unusual—you wouldn't have him present himself to his lady all lopsided with a mosquito-bite?"

Bryson: And when the old lady died, William and Esther got married—very close to their sixties, both of them.

Gould: And he carried her off to Green Island to live the rest of their lives in peace.

Bryson: It's very interesting that *his* mother was not an obstacle.

Gould: Oh no; she would welcome Esther.

Peterson: Mrs. Blackett is one of those old ladies one would like to meet, and doesn't very often. She had that instinctive sympathy for other people, that quick and immensely tactful sensitive understanding.

Bryson: And how marvelously Miss Jewett gives you that feeling

when she paints that scene of the tribe getting together, the Bowden family reunion.

Peterson: How everybody greets Mrs. Blackett, how they all treat her as if she were different from everybody else. . .

Bryson: Because she epitomizes the best in them.

Peterson: Mrs. Todd has tears in her eyes when she sees the veneration and affection with which everybody greets her mother. And the author notices the extraordinary quality of the faces around the table at this big reunion. She says, "The reserve force of society grows more and more amazing to one's thought. More than one face among the Bowdens showed that only opportunity and stimulus were lacking,—a narrow set of circumstances had caged a fine, able character and held it captive." She says, in other words, that these people were part of the great reserve of talented and able people all over the world, and that it was merely an accident that they were in a back-water instead of out running the nation.

Gould: Are these characters really all fundamentally good, or are they somewhat idealized? There is no evil in Miss Jewett's world except in the extremes of nature.

Peterson: That is a limitation, you have to admit; she bypasses meanness as much as she can. Once in a while she seems to be aware of mean people even in this community, but she has her whole soul bent on bringing out the essential decencies of human nature. And to us, who are accustomed by now to reading only about the indecencies in all of us, it may seem more idealized than in fact it is.

Gould: In other words, there are no really strong, masculine emotions in the book. They are all muted. These people are seen in an atmosphere of sweetness, not sentimentality but profound sweetness, that carries all through their lives and their relations with each other.

Peterson: They are all people who have lived, and in order really to appreciate that you have to have lived yourself. Perhaps this is not literature for the young.

Bryson: Perhaps that's why she's a neglected classic, because the young determine our literary fashions these days and these are not young emotions. They're the emotions of middle-aged people.

Peterson: It's life seen in the whole and in retrospect, with a certain perspective and proportion, knowing what's important and what's unimportant—which, of course, one never does when one is young.

Gould: The narrator, when she tries to sum up this village and its people, remarks: "Santa Teresa says that the true proficiency of the soul is not in much thinking, but in much loving, and sometimes I believed that I had never found love in its simplicity as I had found it at Dunnet Landing. . . Their counterparts are in every village in the world, thank heaven, and the gift to one's life is only in its discernment." Do you think their counterparts are in every village in the world, Miss Peterson?

Peterson: I do indeed. There are counterparts even in New York.

Bryson: There *are* counterparts, but of course the limitation of Sarah Orne Jewett is that there are also many other kinds that she doesn't include. She doesn't ever give you the meanness of village

life, as it is pictured by some writers; their people are breathing hate down one another's necks, but hers tolerate one another.

Peterson: If she'd been French, how different this book would have been!

Gould: Miss Jewett was born, lived and died in the little village of South Berwick, in the extreme southwestern corner of Maine on the New Hampshire line, within smell but not sound of the sea. This was a country where the farm and the sea joined hands and the people gained their living from these few sources of income. The clipper ship days were over, the great era of shipbuilding had gone by and modern industry had begun to creep in, bringing with it a new type of people—Irish, French-Canadians, immigrants of various nationalities—even though the old Yankee stock was still hanging on to the things they had known. Now Miss Jewett wrote about these people and this environment. It was her best vein; when she got away from it and tried to do something else, as she did in an artificial historical novel, *The Tory Lover*, she was completely unsuccessful.

Peterson: I think perhaps one ought not to leave it on the note of too much sweetness. It's sweet the way a good New England apple is sweet—with a touch of tartness. It's not cloying sweetness. There are, of course, a few people who represent the darker and shadier sides of life. Do you remember the story of the Bray girls, the two middle-aged sisters whose father left them penniless and they had to go and live as charges on a poor farm?

Gould: That story, of course, is not in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*.

Bryson: No. It's part of Miss Jewett's picture of Maine, however. At the same time, I think we have to take into account a story like *A White Heron*, which in my opinion is one that only a few writers in world literature could ever have matched. I don't know anything in Turgenev more beautiful, of its kind, than *A White Heron*.

Gould: If you hadn't mentioned it, Mr. Bryson, I should have. I think it is the highest point of creative genius that Miss Jewett ever reached. There's a cosmic emotion at the heart of it.

Peterson: It's about a little girl named Sylvia who lives on a farm with her grandmother and loves everything in nature. A young huntsman comes along—an ornithologist, actually—who wants very much to track down the nest of a white heron that he's seen, since it is an unusual bird for that part of the country. She thinks she knows where it is. She climbs an enormous pine tree to find it, going from an oak over into the pine and then to the top, making a tremendous effort. She sees the nest. But even though the ornithologist has offered her ten dollars—a tremendous amount of money to her—when she comes down she can't bring herself to tell him where it is.

Bryson: The simple, direct way in which that is conveyed is the very essence of Sarah Orne Jewett. That story explains why, if she is a writer for you at all, she gives you enormous pleasure.

A. W. KINGLAKE

Eothen

(As broadcast September 18, 1955)

THOMAS RITCHIE ADAM

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T. V. SMITH

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LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: One always includes a travel book in a discussion of books on nature, but this one presents a problem because it gives you very little landscape, it gives you very little nature background, and yet somehow it keeps you fascinated as very few travel books do. Can you pin down precisely what the charm of Kinglake is?

Smith: Well, here is a young man on the prowl in the world with his senses all developed. The world was his oyster and he was going to eat it, but he found his own mind and his reactions to the world much more interesting. And that's what interests *us*: his reactions rather than what he reacted to.

Bryson: I think that's right. And he was a young man, Kinglake was.

Smith: In his twenties.

Adam: Perhaps the really interesting thing is not just that he was a young man, but that he was a young man of a very definite character and of a very definite period. He was a young Victorian Englishman, an upper-class Englishman, running around in the undeveloped Arab world of the early nineteenth century.

Bryson: Undeveloped even from the standpoint of Victorian industrial society.

Adam: Undeveloped from the standpoint of human living! Don't forget the pest, the plague, that runs through the whole book. The fact is that he ventured his life; all the time he was there he was threatened by the bubonic plague.

Bryson: I think, Mr. Smith, that we've got to watch for evidences of British colonialism in what Mr. Adam says here.

Smith: We'll put him in his place before this is over, if he sides with this young pup Kinglake!

Bryson: But you need to have not only a fresh mind, reacting to an interesting landscape and interesting people—you also need to have some kind of literary power. This boy could write.

Smith: He certainly could. I called him a young pup because he's so refreshing, you know. He's yapping at the heels of the world. And he knew how to put it all into words: the book is shot through with lovely phrases like "a man carefully shot and carelessly buried," or "the birthless past and the future that has no end." There's hardly a page that doesn't have phrases or passages that are matchless from the point of view of style.

Bryson: Of course, he set out to do something which in those

days was not exactly commonplace. We travel in comfort, we travel in safety, but he was really taking his life in his hands when he took off from the western edge of the Turkish Empire and headed for Cairo.

Adam: He did it for pleasure, and he did it to extend his own soul. But I want to ask you whether you think the quality of this book is really due to true literary excellence, or to the boy's personality—the fact that he was an irrepressible youth and did not feel the same responsibility toward misery and suffering that we are obligated to feel today?

Smith: Well, he's a young man without any real stake in it whatsoever. He wished to see the world. Why shouldn't he take it in an irresponsible, light-hearted manner?

Adam: Could you send your students to the Near East and expect them to show the same pleasant literary indifference and superiority, the same feeling that they could go home any time they wanted to and leave it all behind?

Smith: Our students are twentieth-century Americans. They aren't Britons of the nineteenth century.

Bryson: I don't think even the British could do it any more; I protect Mr. Adam there, before he has a chance to defend himself. I don't believe that the young Englishman or Scotsman nowadays could go to the Near East and be as indifferent to the suffering of the people around him as this young man was.

Smith: I don't think so, either.

Bryson: Our time has a different temper.

Smith: He had not only the confidence of a conquering race on whose empire the sun never set, but the confidence of a young fellow who dares to have a theory about everything. On one page he declares that a Greek was the author of *The Arabian Nights*, not an Oriental, and gives his reasons and passes on as though he'd settled it. There is something very beautiful about the impudence, not to say the arrogance, of this intellectual attitude.

Adam: I wonder if it is because the young man represents almost a classical outlook, rather than a truly modern Christian one. His feeling is not one of any humility at all, but of that almost classical indifference.

Smith: It interests me that he dabs all the holy cities of the world, saying there's not one of them—except Jerusalem, perhaps—in which you dare sleep lest the fleas eat you up. And when he comes to ancient Troy, he settles all the questions about it to his own satisfaction—not as a scholar, though he knew Greek, but as a man of the world.

Bryson: I think you've got two things here: I think Kinglake had an impudence that was personal and an arrogance that was typical of his race and its position in the world at that time. He was impudent like any boy of twenty-two who has a good mind and a fresh outlook on things, but he was arrogant as the conquering Briton in the midst of a developing empire. They merge, but they're quite different things.

Smith: That's right. Almost from the beginning you see him getting his way because he was an Englishman and had unlimited gall.

Adam: Yes, I would admit that, but I would point out that Kinglake was definitely non-political. He was not interested in politics; he did not really believe that he was carrying the British Empire with him, but he looked clearly at the scene and he saw that the people wanted Europe. The local population were in a terrible mess. Plague was decimating them.

Bryson: As he went further toward Cairo he got deeper and deeper into misery and disease.

Adam: And he got the feeling that the people wanted European intervention. It was perfectly natural. They didn't have our qualms.

Smith: It's the *ground* on which he got it that's astonishing, though, rather than the fact that he got it all. He says, for instance, as a generalization about the whole Middle East, that the Asiatic seems to be animated with a feeling of profound respect, almost bordering on affection, for those who have done him any bold and violent wrong. I see no limit to the yielding and bending of his mind when he was worked upon by the idea of power, and while he deprecates this in a certain sense, he says, nevertheless, "I think that one of the greatest drawbacks to the pleasure of traveling in Asia is the being obliged more or less to make your way by bullying." I say he deprecates it. He was civilized enough to see it, but he goes on the assumption that it is absolutely necessary—that the Asiatic has to be bullied in order to make him respect you. This is a *hideous* assumption.

Bryson: It's one that has been made not only by Europeans, however, but also by the Asiatics' own rulers.

Smith: In Italy during the war I got well acquainted with my control commission, three Italian Ministers of Education. This was a British-American show, and after I was well acquainted with them I asked them, "How do you feel about us British and us Americans?" And they replied in the stereotype, all of them, as though it were memorized: "We respect the British but don't like 'em, and we like the Americans but don't respect them."

Bryson: Now that seems to me to cast some light upon the character of this young British colonial—well, potential colonial administrator, as he might have been. Do you mean they didn't like the Americans because they didn't show enough power? In that case, Kinglake was right in saying that the people of the eastern end of the world like power even if it's exercised against them.

Adam: I'm going to go very British on this, I'm afraid. . .

Smith: Go ahead!

Adam: I'm going to suggest—and it's a terrible heresy in an American environment—I'm going to suggest that it's not necessary, or even sometimes one's moral duty, to be liked. I believe that in dealing with other peoples one should fulfill one's destiny, whatever that destiny may be in terms of one's capacity, without being loved. I think the British have done this, and I think Kinglake is an excellent example of them. This desire to be loved is, I believe, the great American weakness.

Smith: I talked in London many years ago with a retired British civil servant, a medical man from Africa, and it dawned on me one day that in his surgical practice on the natives he never used anaes-

thetics. I was horrified at this. I said: "You don't mean that the great British Empire can't afford anaesthetics?" "Oh, no," he said, "I don't mean that, but you're quite right: I didn't use them. The natives don't feel pain the way we do." Now when you start down this track. . .

Bryson: But he was *not* a representative Briton, you would say.

Adam: Oh, I don't know whether he was a representative Briton, but as a doctor he ought to have been drummed out of the profession for sheer ignorance.

Smith: Well, of course he ought—but a lot of people ought to be drummed out of existence.

Bryson: Some well-placed funerals are certainly justified in the world, but let's not get on to a list of the people we'd most like to see removed, because that would take much too long. As for Kinglake, Mr. Adam says he wasn't political and he isn't. He doesn't tell you anything about the political situation in Egypt, beyond making the prophetic statement that some day Egypt would be part of the British Empire.

Smith: And if he had been in Cyprus yesterday, we wouldn't get any facts about that dispute.

Bryson: You might get a wonderfully vivid picture of what the Cypriotes looked like while they were protesting against British domination, but you wouldn't get any comment on the politics of the situation. And yet he speaks, in a sense, for the very essence of colonialism, whatever that is.

Smith: His psychology of colonialism is that the other guy doesn't feel the way we feel.

Adam: I wouldn't agree with Mr. Smith. I think that you find the very essence of British colonialism in that charming episode where he was concerned with the misfortunes of a group of Israelites who were being persecuted by the Moslems. The local Moslem prophet declared that the Israelites would be despoiled at nine o'clock on a certain morning, and his prophecy came literally and startlingly true. When Kinglake was asked to interfere by the Israelites, he said that he was torn between the impropriety of interfering as a representative of his own culture, and the shamefulness of not doing what he knew he should do according to his conscience. That is the real paradox of colonialism. It's easy enough not to interfere, to let people go their own way, to let the plague, the lack of education, and the miserable conditions exist; it's not your business. But if you've got the power to interfere and help, is it not shameful to refuse? That is the whole position of the European in North Africa up to the present day.

Smith: It's the *way* you interfere, the assumptions on which you base your interfering. I've always felt that there is a profound difference, even now, between the typical Britisher and the typical American in this. I rode in a train that crossed North Africa during the war, and when the train stopped we would bargain with the Arabs for eggs and chickens and so on. More than once I saw a British officer bully them and beat them down. . .

Bryson: A British officer?

Smith: Yes, a British officer!

Bryson: But not *the* British officers.

Adam: Thank you, Mr. Bryson!

Smith: When the train started to pull out and the Arab had no recourse, the officer grabbed the basket of eggs and rode off with them without paying anything at all. This horrified me. I mean, it's the assumption that the Asian is automatically filled with a feeling of profound respect for people who browbeat him.

Adam: Were you in the Invasion? Did you see what happened to souvenirs in the friendly countries?

Smith: As for this matter of colonialism, the British and we are coming out at the same end, but we've gone through a vastly different tunnel in order to get there. One day, thinking of all this in an Arab village where I was quartered. . .

Bryson: If you wrote it yourself, Mr. Smith, you can read it; otherwise not!

Smith: I hereby certify that I wrote it myself, in Tizi-Ouzou:

A GLANCE BY DAY, A THOUGHT AT NIGHT

Hear you not, O Man, through noisy rags

The Arab heart beat humanly?

Earthy with patience, suspect of hope,

He tills the stones to reap but tares of poverty.

On mountain road with shuffling feet unshod,

Braves he the edge to let our cars whirl by,

Seasoning sad thoughts the while with pungent petrol.

She too bows her back to upland jug or child,

Tattooed of face and silent at the core.

Who dares declare what these two think or feel?

How know the patient who ourselves no patience know?—

We who thump the earth with knowing thumb, find her ripe,

Bid Science rip her heart, to float our joys on juice!

How tell the Everlasting Yea to meagre men,

Or touch their Ageless Nay with hope affirmative?

Two lines converge but never run to meeting,

Two vital streams lost each to each in alien guess.

In passing, once, I marked a rift within the haze,

And through the barest chink of smile,

An Arab raised his hand, perchance to brush a fly—

While I, surprised, saluted.

I don't think there's any American who didn't feel an occasional twinge in his heart during the time he was there. Now that British officer might have *acted* differently, but he wouldn't *feel* any different—because he's convinced that the Asiatic has to be browbeaten if you're going to make him respect you. That British officer didn't need to be liked, he needed to be respected.

Bryson: Let me come to the defense of the British Empire, not that it needs it. But it seems to me that you are comparing two peoples who entered the arena of colonial domination at two different stages of development. It would be far fairer to take the British colonialism of 1834 and compare it with the way we treated the American Indian a few generations later, than it is to compare it with our attitude now.

The British started the tradition of exploitation and had to learn through the development of the whole western conscience to be sensitive. *We* didn't enter into colonialism until we had outgrown our early brutalities. Is that fair?

Smith: I think that's fair. Incidentally, Tocqueville traveled in America about the same time that Kinglake was traveling in the Near East, and he makes observations to much the same effect that you do here.

Adam: Curiously enough, Mr. Smith, I would come to your defense. In the actions of that British officer I think there is the whole criticism of colonialism. Colonialism is often an absolute necessity, but it depends on good manners.

Smith: That's all I've been saying, Sir!

Adam: And the British have not always had good manners; the great thing is, can the United States take up the burden and do it with good manners?

Bryson: But not expecting to be loved?

Adam: No, not to be loved. Good manners is a very different thing from being loved.

Smith: Malcolm MacDonald, who was the British Commissioner-General in Southeast Asia, said in a recent magazine article: "Colonialism is a bad system of government. The attack on it is right in principle. Western rule could never have been anything but a passing phase in Asian history." I cite this only to confirm that what you were saying is true. Does the Asiatic want to be browbeaten? Well, if you think he does, then colonialism results on every easy occasion. If you think he doesn't, any more than you do, then you're off on a completely different tack.

Bryson: When Kinglake went out to the Near East a hundred and twenty-odd years ago, he went without a preconceived idea of how to get along with these people. But because he was English, and because they expected him as an Englishman to behave in certain ways, he found that he fell into the pattern of bullying them to get what he wanted. Now wasn't that about as much their fault as his?

Smith: I think it was. He says that one of the sad things about traveling is that you have to do this. He constantly does it himself, you see, but he does it only because he can make this assumption (it's a kind of conventional assumption). Wherever it's made, though, you get brutality as a result.

Bryson: Can I go back to your poem a minute, Mr. Smith?

Smith: Yes.

Bryson: You used a phrase that struck me. I wonder if you really meant it. You spoke of "their Ageless Nay." Do you mean that you think these Arab people will never come out of their medievalism? In that case Kinglake's attitude is right: we must bully them into accepting whatever good they can understand; otherwise they will never grow into the full manhood of civilized living in our terms.

Smith: No, I don't think it follows, what you say, at all.

Bryson: You didn't mean to convey . . . ?

Smith: No. I think you can have a fatalism that isn't medieval in any sense. I mean an acceptance of an order of nature.

Bryson: That's all I meant.

Adam: I would remind you that at the time Kinglake was writing this book, Egypt was just starting its career as a modern nation under the leadership of a man who was actually a European, a Macedonian—Mohammed Ali. It was all very French, with French engineers, French advisers, French culture. The change in the fatalism of the Egyptians came because of the essential and necessary contact with the technological west.

Smith: Even the plague has been dissipated.

Adam: Even the plague, and in its place they have got a population problem that is changing the whole of their culture.

Bryson: I think you could say that what we have done by our sanitary and medical intervention in the Middle East is to change a problem of death into a problem of birth. Now Kinglake couldn't have foreseen this, and I don't think that Kinglake's kind of gentlemanly charity would necessarily have led to this.

Adam: I agree with you. I think that Kinglake would have been willing to go home and leave these people to stew in their own juice. He hasn't got that pure passion to stay, such as Lady Hester Stanhope had; she was the great William Pitt's niece who lived with the Arabs and tried to be a prophetess among them.

Bryson: There is always a British spinster somewhere in the world trying to be a prophetess. That's one of the inevitable phases of the contact between Europe and the east.

Adam: Sinful mankind requires British spinsters to keep it in line.

Smith: We've been speaking of a kind of cultural impudence, but it carries with it this capacity to live alone and like it, without depending on other human beings, as illustrated in the case of Lady Hester Stanhope. She remained out there all by herself, was a kind of sorceress, was respected by everyone—possibly because she browbeat them in a certain sense, at least psychologically.

Bryson: That wonderful incident in the desert shows what British. . .

Smith: I was just coming to that. It's the most marvelous thing. Kinglake was crossing the trackless desert in a small caravan; they had gone for days and days without seeing a living soul, when they discovered on the horizon a caravan coming toward them. It turns out to be another Englishman with only three retainers, and what is the problem that Kinglake debates as they near each other? Whether he should speak to this fellow! He finally decides not to; that would be an intrusion on the other's privacy. The other man, meantime, has been debating the same problem and has resolved it in the same way. They pass with a grave salute but without a word.

Bryson: Miles from any other human being. . .

Smith: Hundreds of miles. But the servants spoke to each other, the camels got to fraternizing, and finally *they* had to fraternize a bit. The other Englishman, rather fearful that he was going too far, said: "I daresay you wish know how the plague is going in Cairo. I can't tell you statistically." This capacity to be insular and to make a virtue of it is what lies back of such behavior.

Bryson: That's why Kinglake can walk in to a local official and defy him, do exactly what he pleases: he's not representing the British government, he's just a private citizen.

Adam: But he's representing his class.

Bryson: That's just the point.

Adam: And that seems to be Kinglake's weakness; his charm, his own moral feeling against bullying and being arrogant, is always subordinate to the privileges of his classe. He thinks that as a member of his class he's got to accept all this, even though he personally thinks it's rather the wrong thing to do. He's very much the English gentleman first and a Christian second.

Bryson: Both you gentlemen seem to say that the great power which has the best chance to do good in the world now, the United States with its strength and its economic resources, doesn't produce people like Kinglake. Should we?

Smith: I don't think we should. He was typical of his country and his class in the time he lived. The question is, is it true that some human beings respond constructively to a kind of treatment that we ourselves would respond to in a different way? Is it true that some people in the world require bullying in order to have them respect you, and is respect the thing one needs? That question remains, and it troubles me no little.

Adam: Do it the other way, even though you take on much greater responsibility than has ever been done before. I only hope it *can* be done.

Bryson: When you say "the other way," do you mean with affection?

Adam: Yes.

Bryson: Expecting affection in return?

Adam: No, expecting nothing in return—doing it because it should be done.

Smith: I wholly agree that the business of wanting to be liked is the great weakness of our countrymen. You can't build a culture, I'm afraid, on being liked. It's too unstable. Affection has got to be mixed with respect. But do you get respect in this sadistic way, or do you get it in another way?

Bryson: I think it goes deeper than our behavior in international affairs or our incipient empire, if we're going to have one—which I hope we won't. Our idea of power, even in domestic affairs, is that one gets what one wants by being liked, not by anything else. That may be a basic flaw in our ideas.

Smith: It's power *with* rather than power *over*, however.

Bryson: That's right. And I would think that Kinglake's fascination for us is partly his great literary skill, but also the fact that he represents a kind of messenger of empire that's passed from the earth.

H. M. TOMLINSON

The Sea and the Jungle

(As broadcast September 25, 1955)

ALFRED KAZIN

• GEORGE LAMMING

• LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: No book was ever more aptly named, because this is a book about the sea and about the jungle, and about nothing else. It's astonishing that anyone could have written a book in which such simple material could be so endlessly developed.

Lamming: He quotes a "quaintly superior" observation of Thoreau's: "It is not worth while going round the world to count the cats in Zanzibar." And the authority with which *The Sea and the Jungle* is written can be measured by the challenge in this observation of Thoreau's. Here is H. M. Tomlinson, a man born in the East End of London, growing up in the shadow of the docks and of ships coming in from distant worlds, and then becoming a journalist in Fleet Street. . .

Bryson: Though not writing about ships?

Lamming: Not at all. He just felt this intense need for experience, chucked the office life, went out to a land he had only read about, and used it as the occasion for a very subjective report on his experience.

Kazin: Yes. This is a man who had all his life a passion for reading Thoreau and Melville; who was very fond of American authors; who was very fond of all travelers in South America, like Bates, who sought and found the most beautiful blue butterflies in Brazil, or like the famous old German philosopher and traveler, Von Humboldt. The picture of Henry Major Tomlinson sitting in a Fleet Street office, dying to get over, dying to see it all, and suddenly chucking it, seems to me to be an essentially literary idea. He dreams of foreign places, he dreams of Bates' blue butterflies, and suddenly he gets very sick and tired of November in London, of the wet mud in which he tries to raise some flowers, of suburban life. Something presents itself, the one extraordinary thing that ever did come his way: a ship that would make its way clear across the Atlantic to Brazil, and then up the Amazon deep into the heart of the continent itself. He would see, overwhelmingly so, both the sea and the jungle without ever leaving this one ship, the *Capella*.

Bryson: I still don't quite believe the opening of this book, even after reading it several times. It's just too pat. It's what every reporter, as he slogs around in a city, hopes will happen to him, what every publisher's reader hopes will happen to him. But it doesn't happen. In this case it did.

Lamming: I should like to touch a bit on the subject of the

tedium and dullness of the city. Actually, one notices throughout this book a certain ambivalence. Although he feels the need to escape from the routine of life in an office, from the routine of going every evening back to his garden, there is a passage in the book that explains his feeling for the necessity of this routine. It's very interesting. After the skipper of the ship has been trying to persuade him to go with the simple words "Then why don't you chuck it?" and he just wants to escape—escape, that is, from the routine of the life he's been living—he goes on to say: "I had never thought of that. It is the last solution which would have occurred to me concerning the problem of captivity. It is a credit to you and to me that we do not think of our chains so disrespectfully as to regard them as anything but necessary and indispensable. . . ." He is a kind of minor rebel, and doesn't totally rebuke or reject the routine of life.

Bryson: In his feeling of breaking out of his chains there is nothing of what you find in Swift, for instance. It's not disgust with human beings that makes him want to break away. As a matter of fact, he talks very little about the human beings to whom he was chained, except in one or two very revealing emotional comments. It isn't people that he wants to get away from, it's the way in which people have organized themselves.

Kazin: I think it's essentially a literary passion that drives him on, and the book itself is, in a very good sense though not always in a good way, a literary book. That is, it's the book of a man who keeps a diary in order to record his own sensations.

Bryson: He goes out to *write* a book.

Kazin: He goes out to write a book, but it's the book of a man who all his life long has been reading books. There, it seems to me, is the clue to his passion for far-off places. It's no longer a disgust with civilization. Tomlinson doesn't even pretend any longer to make Thoreau's rejection of the commercial life. No, what he wants to do is to realize in his own person the dreams he has had sitting in a chair. Again and again you get this picture of him—even on the sea, even in the jungle itself—still reading away. I think the most plaintive note in the book is not about the mosquitoes and the flies, but about the lack of reading aboard the ship. As so often happens, a "dear missionary lady" had left "dear missionary pamphlets" which, of course, bored him stiff. What he wanted, I suspect, was on board the ship to read about ships.

Lamming: I think that observation really touches on the origin of this book. First books are nearly always very autobiographical, and there is a sense in which *The Sea and the Jungle* is autobiographical. We must remember that Tomlinson grew up in the East End, and as a boy was always seeing ships and reading about ships. This world which the books created for him became much more concrete when, as a man, he listened in the pubs to the conversation of mariners.

Kazin: But there's something very English here, too. The English are not only the greatest sailors in the world, but also the race *par excellence* to write about the sea. You remember, very early in the book, when Tomlinson recalls that he is making the same voyage now that the famous Bates did. He expresses his dismay, even his contempt,

for a man who could overlook, as Bates did, the actual hardships of the voyage. Now the English passion for projecting yourself into the middle of a jungle and forgetting to note that you have to take a ship to get there, that you have to undergo hardship and pain and annoyances, seems to me to be a clear case of the English passion for the written word. No other nation in the world has written so marvelously about travel, no other nation has made it seem so much like fun—thereby deluding other peoples such as the French, the Germans, or the Americans into thinking that it is fun; getting them to go into the same jungles where they find themselves falling, not into the midst of books freshly made, but into mosquitoes and fever and what not. I think that Tomlinson—even though he is English, even though he is a victim of this charming, wonderful English gift for describing worlds in words—I think that occasionally he feels a certain protest against the literary patina that covers all the discomfort. He wants to say: "For Heaven's sake, it isn't all blue skies. It isn't all the charming ship gliding along between forest banks. It's something which is worse perhaps than pain, it's boredom." The idea of boredom when traveling is, of course, the most unendurable note of all.

Lamming: I think that's a very good point. At the beginning of the book Tomlinson starts building up the picture of continuous disaster which is going to be the measure of his enjoyment. This happens all the time. You remember the terrific gales all across the Atlantic, and you get a feeling on page after page of this book that they're not going to arrive in Brazil at all. This seems to be almost a kind of contrivance. When the *Capella* has reached a certain point in the Atlantic, he recalls that it was only a few weeks ago that another freighter met disaster in the same spot—and wishes that he was back in London.

Kazin: I should like at this point to read just a few lines, because this is a very literary book. . .

Bryson: You don't mean that as an epithet of disdain, do you?

Kazin: No, but I do include in it a very gentle criticism that I hope to get back to, which perhaps we all share, but there is a positive side to being literary. I mean that Tomlinson writes superbly. He's a wonderful writer. For example, very early in the book, as Mr. Lamming has indicated, there is this hurtling drop into sheer chaos when the ship runs into a Christmas storm in the North Atlantic. Here's his description of the sea. Now, mind you, he's been reading about the sea all his life and hungering for it, and now he's right in the middle of it. I think something of man's enduring despair in the face of this impersonal horror, which the North Atlantic can be, is expressed here: "I cannot," says Tomlinson, "even now give a name to the thing that angered me, but can just discern, in the twilight which shrouds the undiscovered, a vast calm face the rock of which no human emotion can move, with eyes that stare but see nothing, and a mouth that never speaks, and ears from which assailing cries and questions fall as mournful echoes, ironic repetitions. This flung stone falls from it, as unavailing as your prayers." But he adds characteristically, "We shall never cease to pray and fling stones alternately, up there into the twilight."

Lamming: I think that passage shows the very contemplative nature of the book. It does another thing, too: it makes one remember that the book really is divided into two parts, as the title suggests. One is the sea and the other is the jungle. And the character which comes out most forcefully in the sea part, more than any member of the crew, is the ship itself. It is described with such minute detail and with such affection that you feel it might have been a person.

Bryson: You know, that's very English, too; it's not only the feeling of the sailor for his ship, it's also the feeling of the English for a triumph of human ingenuity in the face of this vast and terrible chaos.

Lamming: It's also a tendency, I think, to be extremely grateful for being alive.

Kazin: Yes.

Lamming: There is a wonderful passage about the ship: "Her task against those head seas and the squalls was so hard and continuous that the murmur of her heart, which I fancied grew louder almost to moaning when her body sank to the rails, the panic of her cries when the screw raced, when she lost her hold, her noble and rhythmic laborings, the sense of her concentrated and unrelenting power given by the smoke driving in violence from her swaying funnel, the cordage quivering in tense curves, the seas that burst in her face as clouds, falling roaring inboard then to founder half her length, she presently to raise her heavy body slowly out of an acre of foam, the cascades streaming from her in veils,—all this was like great music." And he sums this up with a sentence which is at once his description of and his tribute to the ship: "I learned why a ship has a name."

Kazin: You know, we haven't mentioned the purpose of this voyage.

Bryson: His purpose or the ship's purpose?

Kazin: The ship's purpose. The *Capella* was the first ship ever to make its way up the Amazon and its tributaries to the very heart of the Brazilian jungle and there, if you please, to deliver coal, good Welsh coal fresh out of Swansea docks, to an unbelievably quixotic, impractical, almost desperate attempt to build a railroad from there, the middle of the continent, straight on, to the Pacific ocean. Now that purpose, which no one can seriously believe in, nevertheless does make for empire and for all these white men running around in the jungles of Asia and Africa and so many other places; it explains to me something about the desperately spiritual character of imperialism. It also explains why the English write so well about travel. It's not simply the lust for gold and oil and the rest of it. I think it's a passion for experience pure and simple.

Lamming: Yes.

Kazin: That is, a kind of transcendence of one's own circumstances and also a belief that anything can be made natural. A man writes well if he can reduce to words what seems to be a very far and strange experience. What the English have always done, Conrad and Tomlinson—as well as our good American sea writers like Dana and Melville—is to take the most intractable, foreign, violent, anti-human element on earth, the sea, and make it seem part of human

experience. Obviously the practical reasons for building this railroad in the jungle can't weight any balance sheet against the terrible impracticality of it, against the loss of all those lives.

Bryson: No, it's something spiritual.

Kazin: It's spiritual. Here again is the desperate question that the French, for example, in their period of colonial exploitation always asked the English: "How do you do it?"—meaning how can your Lawrences and your Doughtys and your how-many-other famous literary pilgrims go into the middle of the Palestinian desert or the Asiatic jungle, always fresh, always smiling, in new khaki pants, and come back with so many freshly written books? It seems to me that there, in some way, is the clue to what makes this book possible. This man, who was a sensitive literary man, probably as neurasthenic as most literary men are, goes into the heart of the jungle, he is utterly uncomfortable, and he is simply in a passion of ecstasy because he can *describe* it all, because he can bring it all back written, perhaps overwritten, in beautiful words.

Lamming: Yes, that's true. And the word that seems to describe the mechanics of Tomlinson's mind and feeling is "intensity." What he wanted was not so much experience as a certain *intensity* of experience. And it's always felt most deeply where you are up against a situation that shows you clearly the precariousness of being perhaps alive at all.

Bryson: Tomlinson is like, well, Wagner—who starts out being so intense and so noisy that you wonder how he can possibly contrive a climax, although he miraculously does so. Tomlinson starts out with this storm at sea. You don't see how he could conceivably intensify your feeling of man's being in a precarious position, but he goes from the sea into the jungle, from the jungle into this desperate attempt to build a railroad. It's a miraculous job of beginning at a high pitch, and not only maintaining it but increasing it.

Lamming: Yes, and since you can't go on heightening this intensity with incidents—there aren't very many incidents, actually—you've got to heighten it with image. Throughout the book one finds a sort of passion to make the thing larger than it really is; the images begin to spill over, words get very unruly sometimes. . .

Kazin: Yes, but they never get chaotic. Actually, part of the charm of these passages is the sense of derring-do, and an ironic awareness of man's pettiness in the face of nature.

Bryson: But it's man's indomitability at the same time!

Kazin: The indomitability one takes for granted, or else why should he be there and why should he be writing a book? But I do think that part of the great charm, part of the great pathos of the book is the fact that on the one hand Tomlinson goes in for the most depressing and acutely painful experiences. Boredom. . .

Bryson: And danger.

Kazin: Danger, of course, and tropical diseases and all the rest of it. But more than anything else, it seems to me, he has a sense of man's own ironic self-possession in the face of seas that tumble him up and down, of insects that bore into his white skin, of all the things

in nature that make a man feel that, after all, he is a mere accident of creation. Now, if I may, I'd like to link this very fine book to books like *Moby Dick* and *The Compleat Angler*, which Tomlinson himself admires so much and has learned so much from. In them one gets this wonderful sense of man's littleness in the face of nature. Surely part of the whole brooding grandeur of a book like *Moby Dick* is a sense of the mightiness of the sea, a sense of man's prevailing effort not being strong enough. I like books which remind me that man, after all, is not the sole purpose of creation. I like books which once in a while, if I must sit comfortably in my chair, bring me back the feeling of man's presumption in the face of nature.

Lamming: The difference between the two, it seems to me, is one of emphasis. In *Moby Dick* one is always impressed by a certain moral arrogance that isn't present at all in *The Sea and the Jungle*.

Bryson: And I think there's less moral drama here than there is in *Moby Dick*.

Lamming: Much less.

Bryson: Because there's no embodiment of evil, there's no evil hero. But do you notice that as he maintains this constantly rising intensity, he brings sharply marked individual people more and more into the story?

Kazin: But don't all these people have one great trait in common? They are all failures, charming failures in dirty pants. They are people who have gone out to the jungle for a job, many of them Americans of the old style—Texas cowboys and others like them who perhaps felt lost when our own frontier disappeared (this book was written about an experience of 1909 or 1910). What Tomlinson likes about these people is that they are not commercially successful. Again and again he presents you with a comparison of the City of London clerk, with his celluloid collar and plastered hair, and these fellows. I think the most wonderful and exciting part of the book, the great climax, is where this tall man takes him out into the jungle for a last adventure, and they get lost and Tomlinson has to get himself back on a small railroad handcar.

Bryson: And almost misses the ship!

Kazin: It's a perfect example of how he admires people who take a chance, who don't know how or when they will get back, and at the same time of the civilized man's passion for danger. For Tomlinson, though he's no City banker, is a city man. That is, he's not a sailor. He's a man who loved these things from afar, fundamentally. Isn't that true?

Lamming: Yes.

Kazin: And this sense of danger fascinates me—the fact that so sensitive a man will go out into the jungle, which sounds formidable, I must say, with its creeping vines, its millions of strange animals, its crocodiles and snakes; it's a familiar picture from melodrama, but it's all terribly real when you read Tomlinson's book. The ship is sliding along between the banks of the jungle, and at every point you see these yawning primeval specimens about to make a hash of all literature. . .

Bryson: You have a feeling that the yawn is going to end with the two jaws crunching the ship.

Kazin: Exactly. Yet the book is not a novel, it's autobiography. And I think we should say a word here about the very nature of a literary effort that seeks to be no more than autobiographical—that is, the book is not meant to be dramatic in the way that *The Heart of Darkness* or *Moby Dick* is. It's dramatic only in the way that the man addressed himself to the pictorialization of his own sensations.

Lamming: Of course, although it's not a novel, one can see all the time the hand of a potential novelist working with this material.

Bryson: And the things you remember in the book are not the elaborate and powerful descriptions, which you experience just as you would experience the sea itself (they take almost the same amount of patience), but the little things like the Portuguese woman who insisted on staying in the jungle with her husband. Tomlinson sees her pathetic little body carted off to a grave that was certain from the beginning, her foot dangling in its European shoe. It's just a sentence or two, but it stings.

Lamming: Also, one notes in Tomlinson an almost ruthless kind of aloofness when he describes certain things. Do you remember the horrible scene in which they killed the cow on deck, hammering a knife into its back? This is all done without any sense of involvement at all. When he's writing about these things, the things that strike one as being very unpleasant, he's completely objective. *There* seems to me to be the novelist in Tomlinson.

Kazin: How do you account for the aloofness? Is it lack of feeling, is it lack of partisanship, or is it simply the artist's necessary impersonality?

Lamming: I think in the case of Tomlinson it is the artist's impersonality in a situation in which morally he doesn't feel involved.

Kazin: Isn't it true, too, that when a writer goes out to the jungle by way of the sea to experience the most extreme dangers, anything which seems horrible and cruel will, in a literary sense, delight him? Again and again, especially on the sea, one has a picture of the writer being grateful for these hard blows of reality which, in London, are shielded or kept under the surface.

Lamming: Yes.

Kazin: Take one small incident. The captain has no bugs in his cabin. The sailors, of course, have too many in theirs, so they put some bugs in a matchbox and blow them down the funnel. The captain himself is almost cynical about this, but it delights Tomlinson. I think part of his reaction against the romantic writings of Bates, the scientific writings of Von Humboldt, is that these people never convey sufficiently the actual order and experience of living on board ship.

Bryson: I think sometimes that what one really needs to get the full savor of Tomlinson is an opportunity to put almost as much time into reading the book as he put into the journey.

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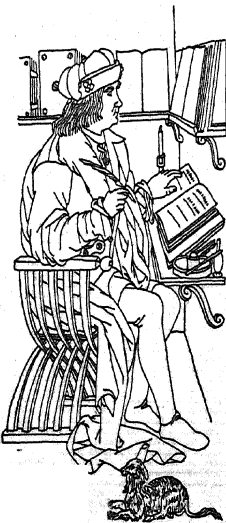
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WILLA CATHER

The Professor's House

(As broadcast October 2, 1955)

LEON EDEL

• MAXWELL GEISMAR

• LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: When one undertakes to reappraise an important writer, perhaps the first thing to do is to find a book that will in some way act as a kind of pivot for your opinion because it was also a pivot in the career of the writer. And that, I suppose, could properly be a description of *The Professor's House*.

Edel: I think it is a good description, because this book always seems to me to reflect the mounting anxieties and tensions that Willa Cather felt after the first World War.

Bryson: She put them into fiction, but did she get rid of them that way?

Edel: Well, I don't think so, because she went on putting the same feelings into her other novels from then on.

Bryson: So it marks not only a crisis in her life, but a turn in the direction of her work?

Edel: It had begun earlier, but I think one sees a crystallization of it in this novel.

Geismar: It may be a characteristic of lady writers, because it has just occurred to me that Ellen Glasgow went through the same kind of soul-searching in a number of novels that she wrote more or less in this same period.

Bryson: Is there something in the way we treat lady writers that leads to a crisis which they take out in their books?

Geismar: No, I think you can find the same thing in masculine writing, too. Perhaps it comes out more directly in the women writers, but I can't be sure.

Bryson: But you suggest something that interests me a good deal, because it may have something to do with Cather's stature as a writer. Do you think that women novelists are likely to be more consistently autobiographical than men novelists?

Geismar: I would hesitate to stake my reputation on it, but I think so.

Edel: I'm not sure. I have an idea that all novelists are consistently autobiographical, even when they're not writing about the facts of their lives.

Bryson: What's the nature of this crisis which is reflected in *The Professor's House*? Was it wholly personal or was it in her surroundings?

Edel: Oh, I think both; they combined to create this tension. There'd been the war, to begin with, which I think damaged a great many lives and changed the whole world for everyone. A lot of her friends had slipped away; some had married and gone to live else-

where—people that she'd known for a long time. She had decided to devote herself entirely to writing and had left her career as a journalist and editor. But there seemed to be deeper things than any of these, and one must go very far back in her life to find them.

Bryson: But when a writer of importance puts a crisis into a book, you have to look at the book as a thing in itself, don't you? What's the machinery by which she tried to depict this rejection of the world?

Edel: We have in the title the symbol of the house. Professor St. Peter is in this house, he's been in it for many years, and he won't move out of it.

Geismar: Even though his family does.

Edel: His family is moving into a new house and they expect him to come, too. But he's clinging to that old attic of his, where those two tailor's dummies are still there on which his daughter's clothes were sewn. He likes the old place. The plumbing is bad, it's a ramshackle sort of house now, but he still wants to stay there. He doesn't want to move forward with his family.

Geismar: And over him hangs the very real threat of asphyxiation, which finally almost gets him, because the ventilation of the house is so bad.

Edel: But what he doesn't want is to be swept up in the swanky suburban life of his daughter. The new house symbolizes all that.

Geismar: I should like to point out, too, that the tailor's dummies represent a kind of rejection of real women. His love affair with his wife has ended.

Bryson: But it was very real in the beginning.

Geismar: Oh, yes. But nevertheless you feel that it is over. His wife has found a new life for herself without him; he feels repudiated by her and by his children, who no longer satisfy him; the students he is teaching seem to him mediocre—he makes a point of saying that. There's a wonderful scene with the competing professor, whom they call Lily Langtry because he's a popular professor. He tries to make peace with him and the other man won't, and he wonders why the other can't see that their fight had been a draw, that they had both been beaten.

Bryson: But what is it that has suddenly made life not worth having? Because that's what the book says, isn't it?

Geismar: Yes, all the way through it's a rejection of human relationships, of family relationships; it's also quite clearly a rejection of modern society.

Edel: It seems to me that the professor is in a bad state of depression. This is really what's happened to him. He's depressed, and for reasons which Miss Cather does not make clear at all. He's got everything to live for: he's won a prize akin to the Pulitzer Prize, only apparently with even more money in it than that; he's written a great book—a great series of books; he's a well-known historian; he's got his work to live for; his daughters have married, on the whole, quite well; they've got charming husbands.

Bryson: And his wife still loves him. Although he's rejected her, she has not rejected him.

Edel: But we must remember that the professor was always a bit of an isolationist, you know. He had that little garden of his that he had built in the shape of a French garden. It was quite special. He liked to go to the lakeside all by himself. He was an epicure, do you remember? He liked wines and cooked his own food in a certain way. There was a great deal of withdrawal in his whole life.

Geismar: He even looked like a Spaniard more than he did like an American.

Edel: Yes, Miss Cather makes a point of that. He's a rather precious fellow in some ways.

Bryson: She doesn't quite explain why the professor wants to reject life, possibly because she didn't altogether know why she herself wanted to reject it. There may be a key in Tom Outland and Louie Marsellus.

Edel: Marsellus stands for the promoter, really. The other man had made the discovery which Marsellus capitalizes on and thus Louie stands as a symbol of the period, which was very much on Miss Cather's mind.

Bryson: That's what she doesn't like, and it's what the professor didn't like. But this wonderful episode of Tom Outland's year on the mesa—what part does that play in the machinery of the book?

Geismar: It's a recurrent symbol with Willa Cather; the only refuge she could find from the torment of her inner life and of her polite rejection of American social values seems to have been this symbol of the rock. How that relates to life, I'm not sure. But it was a place where one was on top of the world, where one was away from humanity, a place that would remain after ages had come and gone.

Bryson: But on the rock that Tom Outland and his friend found in the desert, there was the relic of an ancient civilization; there had been people there.

Geismar: She has a beautiful passage on that in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. "The rock," she says, "when one came to think of it, was the utmost expression of human need; even mere feeling yearned for it; it was the highest comparison of loyalty in love and friendship . . . The Acomas [this is the Indian tribe], who must share the universal human yearning for something permanent, enduring, without shadow of change,—they had their idea in substance. They actually lived upon their Rock; were born upon it and died upon it." These two symbols of the mesa and the rock come out in her work several times. I'm not sure that I really know what they mean.

Edel: Well, one finds answers to these things sometimes by looking into the lives of the writers. After all, the works have been projected from their minds, the words have been set down by them. And in Willa Cather's life one can find this kind of withdrawal. My feeling, at least, has always been that it was based on a rather fundamental insecurity in her life which related to houses.

Bryson: Now you're getting very cryptic. What do you mean by "a fundamental insecurity which related to houses"?

Edel: When I went back and looked through her life, it seemed

to me—I suppose this is true in all our lives; we move from one house to another—but in her case . . .

Bryson: We usually take our home along with us, though, don't we?

Edel: Yes, but in her case there had been, first of all, a move from Virginia to Nebraska, a move from a fine, big Southern house to the naked plains. She was about eight or nine when it happened. That was the first big upheaval, and it's a mighty big upheaval for a little girl of eight or nine.

Bryson: That's true—and yet so much of the early work of Willa Cather is based upon her evident determination to show what was fine and beautiful about life among the pioneers.

Edel: Yes, and she described it beautifully.

Bryson: But in this book why does she reject all that?

Edel: Well, with this book she has reached the age of fifty, and certain houses have collapsed.

Geismar: I think she returned to the pioneer scene. That was her first escape, actually. And sometimes I think these are beautiful fairy tales of the frontier; there they are—it is the frontier as a child felt and saw it. She has sometimes a very appealing sense of innocence about life there; I think that particularly comes out in *A Lost Lady*. The picture of the late frontier and of the empire-builder in that book is extremely naive. This is the way a young girl might have seen one of those big empire-builders, aware of all his glamour but lacking any knowledge of how he sometimes, or very often, achieved his railway empire. Don't you agree with that?

Edel: Oh, yes.

Geismar: It bothers you at first, and then it becomes rather charming.

Bryson: Let me be a little insistent about this: Don't forget that the rock discovered by Tom Outland, this beloved student who died and left his fortune to other people to be a degrading element in their lives, according to the professor's thinking—don't forget that that rock had an ancient civilization on it. Now, was it because these people were all dead and their pots were broken and their tombs were exposed to the elements that she found life on the mesa attractive?

Geismar: She was always like that, even from the beginning. Her story is one of a continual retreat farther and farther back in time.

Bryson: She was really running away from life?

Geismar: She was trying to find some security in the past and in ancient civilizations which she could not find in modern life.

Edel: And I think I would add that any writer who continually tries to find security in the past is probably finding the present too much with him.

Bryson: What about the other side of it, the rock? Because there's more here than just a mesa with an ancient civilization on it. It was a rock.

Geismar: Seemingly indestructible.

Edel: Yes, it's there; it's firm; it's a foundation.

Bryson: Does this relate to the crisis in her life, then?

Edel: I didn't finish my account of all the houses that she had lived in. You see, there was first the uprooting from Virginia to Nebraska. Then, after a few years, she went to Lincoln to go to college and again—well, before that, even in Red Cloud, there was that turbulent family home of theirs; there were a good many boys in it, and so on, and she found another house to withdraw to. There were some very kindly neighbors there; they were French. She found books and European culture in their home, and it was a kind of "other house" to withdraw to. Then, when she got to Lincoln, she was constantly in the home of the Westermanns, a very distinguished family.

Geismar: Described in *One of Ours*.

Edel: Yes, in that novel. *There* was another house. Then she went to Pittsburgh to become a newspaper woman and met Isabelle McClung, the daughter of an eminent judge, who invited Miss Cather to come and live in her home. So once again she had a home with culture in it; and in that house—it's rather interesting—she did her writing in a little sewing room with tailor's dummies in it just like the one she described in *The Professor's House*.

Bryson: Was there a bad window and a stove that was likely to asphyxiate her?

Edel: No, there was apparently a very nice view; the house was set high up, just like Tom Outland's tower in the old city on the mesa.

Bryson: But she lost that house, too.

Edel: Yes, she lost it. She came to New York to be managing editor of *McClure's*. She used to go back to Pittsburgh to write for lengthy periods, even long after she'd established herself in New York. She'd always go back to that room, and Isabelle always made her welcome.

Bryson: Until Isabelle married.

Edel: That's right. Isabelle married towards the end of the war. So there, again, was another change.

Geismar: I can add to Mr. Edel's account. When she went up to Boston—which was another home, another refuge for many of these western authors—she was enchanted by the house of Mrs. Fields. Do you remember that?

Edel: Oh, yes!

Geismar: With all its connotations of the past and of culture—also of death. Mrs. Fields was the widow of the great publisher, who was a very informal fellow when he was alive. He had none of this yearning for culture that Miss Cather thought she found in his house. But it is true that she was seeking a series of refuges of some kind throughout her life.

Bryson: Are you saying that this was all generated out of the fact that when she was a little girl she went from something that was secure and noble in Virginia out into the sod houses of the west?

Edel: That was merely one dislocation, one of a series of dislocations. I don't think that one might have been necessarily enough to do it, but when you have a whole series of dislocations and then, when you reach middle age, there's been a war and other contribut-

ing elements of that kind, the insecurities can come to the surface. That seems reflected in this book.

Geismar: I've always felt that there's a mystery in Miss Cather which none of the biographies or memoirs has quite solved for me. Very early in her work she talks about the old wound, hardened and healed, which began to throb again. Now what is this wound—some kind of emotional wound in her own life, which might be related to this childhood uprooting or to family pattern? This gentle, sweet writer of great charm can be rather vicious about family life in some passages. There's one short story where she is.

Bryson: Even in this novel she's vicious about family life. Her description of Rosamond, one of the daughters, is as sharp as it can be.

Edel: Oh, yes, indeed.

Geismar: So that somewhere there is a deep wound in this woman which, I think, creates this kind of tragic sensibility—which to me is very precious, by the way; it's very rare in modern writing.

Bryson: Well, her turning to the rock as a symbol of stability—how much has that to do with a more religious attitude in her own life?

Geismar: The rock must be related to a kind of religious universe which she took great pleasure in, with its ceremonies and its rituals. In *The Professor's House* you remember the lecture that Professor St. Peter gives about science. He says: "All that science brings us in the end is comfort"—it also brought us the bomb, but she couldn't know that—"whereas religion and art provide the true meaning in life." And with Willa Cather, as with Walt Whitman, the artist had come to take the place of the priest. Whitman said this in so many words: "The priest has gone, the artist come." I think in Willa Cather there is the same fusion; the religious spirit in her became an artistic spirit.

Bryson: So she turned, in spite of her less ceremonial upbringing, to the Episcopal Church and became rather a ritualist in her way of living?

Edel: To some extent, yes. Well, perhaps not even "rather"; she became very strongly ritualist. As E. K. Brown said in his biography, towards the end of her life she was building walls around herself.

Geismar: This is a familiar pattern in American culture. We can think of T. S. Eliot. It's particularly true of western writers. Maybe there's something in that "barren, ugly, deformed" western atmosphere that creates a need for ceremony and culture and symbolism. Eliot went through the same process.

Edel: I've always felt that an analogy might be made between Mark Twain and Willa Cather, based on their nostalgia for childhood, for the past. You get it in *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*, and you get it in Willa Cather.

Geismar: In a very different form, though.

Bryson: But it may be an expression of the same thing. I think I wouldn't quite accept Mr. Geismar's adjectives about the west, being a westerner myself. But certainly the west had no past of its own that it was willing to accept, and many sensitive western writers spent their lives trying to borrow a past from somewhere else.

EUGENE O'NEILL

Mourning Becomes Electra

(As broadcast October 9, 1955)

JOHN MASON BROWN

• JOHN GASSNER

• LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: Eugene O'Neill was, I suppose, the only dramatist of recent years who seriously combined the effort to be intellectual in the structure and ideas of his plays with the effort to be a good dramatist, a good playwright.

Brown: He was more than intellectual. I think the distinguishing characteristic of O'Neill is that he is the only modern dramatist who happened to have from the beginning a view of life which connected man with the fates controlling his being; ultimately, what had started as an ironic point of view developed into the grandeur of tragedy. He was a tragic dramatist, and alone among the moderns in making that the major interest of his career.

Bryson: That didn't keep him from being the successful playwright that he was. He did both things—which hasn't been done very often in the history of the theatre.

Brown: I would have to differ there.

Bryson: It has, often?

Brown: It would seem to me that some of the greatest successes, theatrically, have been some of the greatest tragedies.

Gassner: Except that in modern times tragic art has been generally ineffectual or mixed. We have achieved a great deal of mixed drama, such as Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, but we have not achieved much tragic splendor in our theatre since the rise of modern realism with Ibsen and Strindberg. They tended toward the clinical approach rather than the tragic. And what is most remarkable about O'Neill is that he was able to fuse the psychological with the tragic, the commonplace with the exalted, and thereby achieve a certain grandeur out of materials not particularly promising for tragedy.

Bryson: What I meant was that, in modern times, most people who have been tragic poets in a literary sense have not been very good in a theatrical sense. I'm not thinking of classical times, when, of course, the greatest poets were also the greatest dramatists. But in modern times the literary person who tries for deep tragic feeling doesn't generally succeed in getting it across on the boards. O'Neill did. It's a pretty good idea to take a look at what he did it with.

Brown: This is the way I'm using the word "tragic": O'Neill understood the enormity of human suffering, but he didn't leave it to the individual alone. In most modern plays the characters have lived in an uncaring world; they may have been part of a social system that had no place for them, or they may have had trouble with their neighbors. But in O'Neill's plays it is the great angry eye of God, as he said in one of his first stage directions, or it is the life

force, or in this case it is fate and destiny; the gods care, whatever the name he chooses to call them.

Bryson: Is that the reason why he went back to the Greeks for his theme? He *did* go back to the Greeks for *Mourning Becomes Electra*.

Gassner: He did, and he had thought about it a great deal. As long ago as 1926 he set down notes for this tragedy. One of his notes reads: "Modern psychological drama, using one of the old legend plots of Greek tragedy for its basic theme."

Bryson: You're reading from his notes?

Gassner: Yes, I'm reading from his notes. He finally chose the theme of the murder of Agamemnon by his wife Clytemnestra, and the vengeance of his son, Orestes, who killed his mother and her paramour. I should say that he was profoundly influenced by the Greeks, particularly by the trilogy that Aeschylus wrote in the middle of the fifth century B.C. It is possible, though perhaps not too profitable, to draw a parallel between O'Neill's characters and the characters of the original Greek story.

Bryson: He intended such a parallel.

Gassner: Yes, he intended it. The Agamemnon-figure is Ezra Mannon, who comes home from the Civil War as a brigadier general.

Bryson: As Agamemnon came home from the Trojan war.

Gassner: He comes home to his unfaithful wife, Christine, the equivalent of Clytemnestra. The complication arises from the fact that his daughter is extremely fixated on the father and hates her mother—and now has additional reason for hating the mother, because she's attached to the mother's lover . . .

Bryson: That's a modern invention.

Gassner: Yes, that is a modern invention. But Lavinia is the equivalent of Electra. And, by the way, it's interesting to observe that O'Neill was particularly concerned with giving Lavinia more stature than Electra had in the last part of the Aeschylean story. He says in one of his notes, written two years after the one I just read: "Give modern Electra-figure in play a tragic ending worthy of character. In Greek stories she peters out into an undramatic married banality."

Brown: I think what he does—and the stage directions point it up—is not only to give her this new importance, the importance denied her in Aeschylus' *The Furies*, but to make her become more and more like her own mother. After Christine's death Lavinia turns into a new Christine. The malevolent power of the dominant female character remains.

Bryson: What he did was to make his Electra, in the person of Lavinia, a tragic figure by giving her the same evil impetus that her mother had.

Gassner: But he did more than that: he also made sure that she would share the tragic fate of the other characters. As we all know, it would have been possible to tell the story with Electra coming out quite safe. She did in several of the Greek treatments. O'Neill did not like this. He said such a character contained too much tragic fate within her soul to permit a married banality. Why should the Furies

let her escape unpunished? Well, she doesn't escape unpunished here. Moreover, it is characteristic of O'Neill's sense of tragedy that her punishment should be in part an *elected* punishment. She closes the doors on herself, after she has driven her brother to suicide.

Bryson: In a sense this is Aeschylus plus Freud: the continuation of the sense of guilt, the imposition of punishment on one's self. Isn't that what you mean by saying that Freud has entered into O'Neill?

Brown: Yes; and in this case, to much too grim an extent for the play's own good—particularly in the third of the three plays. It's *dunked* in Freud by that time. I think it is an error in writing—in writing that hopes to last—to be too swayed by what is an intellectual fad of the moment. Some people forget that Emerson once subscribed seriously to phrenology, as Marlowe subscribed to Machiavelli or Mr. Shaw to Marx. Those are period definitions in thought. I think the amazing thing about this play, forgetting the Freudian indulgences and the symbolism of the islands and the love and the incest and all these things that he deals with—I think the extraordinary thing is the extent to which O'Neill manages to give you some of the grandeur and glory of a Theban palace in a New England Greek Revival house.

Bryson: I think we're doing something here that was all right for Aeschylus with his audience, but I wonder if it was all right for O'Neill with his. After all, the Greeks who sat in the open-air theatres in Athens and listened to the original trilogy—this also, of course, is a trilogy—knew the story well. They knew everything that was going to happen before it happened. Now, are we taking it for granted that people who saw O'Neill's plays knew the story of the unfaithful wife who, with her lover, killed her husband when he came back from the wars, and of the daughter and the son taking revenge?

Brown: May I most vehemently and passionately say I hope they *didn't*? I can't imagine any luggage more unnecessary, except as an academic indulgence, than to compare, page by page, what O'Neill has done with what the Greeks had done. He took a theme from the Greeks, one of the greatest of all melodramatic and tragic themes, and took it merely as a springboard for a play of his own, restating it in terms that he thought an American audience would understand. And as acted—it was first done by the Theatre Guild and then later revived—it is certainly, from my point of view, one of the most moving evenings I've ever had in the theatre.

Gassner: I couldn't possibly agree with you more. I think that comparisons with the Greek story can become tiresome, and that O'Neill actually counted on his audience's *not* knowing the story.

Bryson: He tells his own story.

Gassner: That particular story, however, can be assessed in terms of tragic, psychological, or clinical drama, and, to some light degree, even social drama. I think it's the weaving of these threads of interest that we must concern ourselves with whenever we think of the play. I should like to come back to the story for a moment. We can trace the story in terms of the fall of a New England dynasty. The Mannons, whose name suggests mammon, are a rich Brahmin dynasty . . .

Brown: Now come, come—they're not *that*!

Gassner: No?

Brown: No. Rich they are, but not Brahmins.

Gassner: But they have a dynasty, in the sense that there is a family tradition. It's a very negative one, of course—it's full of hatred and jealousy—but it is there. And certainly when the play ends and the son of the family, Orin, has committed suicide and his sister Lavinia is going to shut the doors on herself and remain unmarried, we have to assume that the family will come to an end. In other words, there's something of a fall of the House of Mannon in this play, and it is a stirring theme. At the same time, I myself find considerable fascination in the way in which O'Neill did trace the psychological complications. For instance, Lavinia loving her father and hating her mother . . .

Bryson: Also loving her mother's lover.

Brown: And also loving her mother's son!

Gassner: Yes, and ultimately dominating him. It's interesting to see, after Lavinia has driven Orin into killing her mother's lover and the mother has killed herself, how Lavinia begins to take on her mother's characteristics and becomes, of course, the mother to Orin in his imagination. This goes on until, in the third act, we come across a rather touching theme, which I think has sometimes been underrated. I'm referring to the fact that Lavinia, after having given herself up so vehemently to this Oedipal passion and vengeance, has longed for a breath of life and beauty. She's gone to the South Sea Islands with Orin, and there a new world has opened up for her, a pagan world, a world free of conscience, certainly free of inhibitions such as had troubled her.

Bryson: Free of Freud, Mr. Gassner.

Gassner: Free of Freud, let us say. And yet, just as she is about to feel truly free, Orin says, "No, you are not free! We have something in common: our guilt."

Brown: Well, the whole play is guilt. And the eternal problem of tragedy is, of course, how to wring beauty out of ugliness and how to achieve splendor out of what is essentially ignoble and squalid, such as murder. In the case of all great tragedies you forget the police court aspects and care only about the enormity of the crime. Then comes the ennobling moment, the moment of enormous expiation. At the end of all the horror and the murder and the planning and the lusting and the frustration, there comes the speech, when the house is boarded up and Lavinia is left alone with her sorrows, which seems to me one of the noble moments in the modern theatre. Let me just read this one line: "I'll never go out or see anyone; I'll have the shutters nailed close, so no sunlight can never get in; I'll live alone with the dead, and keep their secrets, and let them hound me until the curse is paid out and the last Mannon is let die." If I may say this again, that is on a level of exaltation in sorrow that we rarely get in the theatre.

Gassner: More than that, I think. It reaches the grandeur of what Aristotle might have called—we can call it just as well—recognition, tragic awareness, awareness of human responsibility. Much of our sense of tragic grandeur derives from the fact that we are able to look at our plight, look at our errors, look at our evil, and say: "This is the way it happened; it should not have been this way;

we take upon ourselves the burden of the guilt and the challenge and burden of the expiation."

Bryson: Can you also say that when these characters take on the burden of their own guilt, in spite of the fact that the dialogue is often commonplace, O'Neill succeeds in avoiding any possible trace of sentimentality? This is real suffering, this isn't pseudo-suffering; it really hurts, and you know that it hurts.

Brown: Mr. Gassner mentioned, I suppose almost inevitably, Aristotle. I would like to say, if I may, that the most satisfactory definition of tragedy that I know of happens to be in the Book of Job. It is where the Temanite says: "Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward." I've always tried to insist that great suffering must be carried upward by great language. I think that here intensity takes the place of great language, although this is superb theatre.

Bryson: That seems to me a point one has to take into account in trying to appraise O'Neill. He's often been criticized for the fact that his language is generally commonplace; it isn't poetic. Now you, as a professional critic of the theatre as well as a critic of literature, would say that this, whatever it may be as reading, is wonderful on the stage?

Brown: This is overwhelming, as I found it when I reread it yesterday; I found it enormous, and I found that it read infinitely better than I expected it to. Although O'Neill could not and did not write with that final divine gift of utterance that has sublimity, his emotions were so strong, his theatrical skill so great, his ear so fine for actors, that the speech comes out admirably when spoken.

Gassner: I hate to bring in Aristotle again, but I'd like to point out—particularly to those who are so terribly troubled by O'Neill's "inadequacy" of expression—that even Aristotle, with his great common sense, noted that the essence of drama as a whole is action. I believe that Aristotle is particularly vindicated by O'Neill, because his action is always so mounting and swirling that it carries us along even when his characters are not very articulate.

Bryson: I think it's important to point out, however, that Aristotle didn't mean, nor do you interpret him to mean, that the excitement in a play comes entirely from wondering what's going to happen next. Because, of course, Aristotle was dealing with plays where everybody knew what was going to happen next. Rather, it's the way in which a dramatist—and here, of course, is where O'Neill's essential greatness comes in—can embody the passions in people. As you watch them move you can feel the movement of the passion within them.

Brown: I think that in this particular play, *Mourning Becomes Electra* more than any other, O'Neill did manage to achieve the grandeur, pitch, scale, and sweep of great storytelling. When it opened, Robert Benchley—ever lamented Robert Benchley—wrote a superb review for *The New Yorker*. He did not make fun at all, but he said that as he watched the melodrama he couldn't help but think of Eugene O'Neill's father, James O'Neill (who for years had toured this country playing *The Count of Monte Cristo*), standing in the wings saying, "One, two, three, and the world is mine!" Because the melodrama is there—but to me that's one of its excel-

lences. The original Greek tale is melodramatic, all of the great tragic stories are melodramatic. In this case O'Neill, as usual, is unashamed of emotion. Most dramatists in our realistic theatre are so timid, so frightened by feeling, but O'Neill let go, and with dignity.

Gassner: We tend to underrate action in the theatre, and the result is that we're too glib with our charge of melodrama. Voltaire was able to reduce *Hamlet* to the most absurd melodrama by paring away the characterization, the dialogue, the analysis, and the inner drama, and simply retelling the plot.

Brown: The plot is never the play.

Bryson: Perhaps it's even bad to read a play, Mr. Brown. Would you say—since it isn't likely that this trilogy with all its difficulties, technical and so on, is going to be done very often—that one can get anything out of O'Neill by reading it?

Brown: One certainly *can* get, I should think, a great deal out of this particular play. I know I've read it many times; I reread it, as I said, only yesterday with a mounting enthusiasm. I think I know its faults clearly. But the faults have nothing to do with its virtues, and those virtues are singular virtues in the contemporary theatre.

Gassner: Don't you think it's remarkably easy to stage this play in one's imagination? It seems to me that O'Neill makes it possible for us with his stage directions, which may be a bit dull but are certainly provocative.

Brown: Well, then, although it isn't very likely that anyone will have many chances to see this play done, one can at least get a notion of it if he can use his imagination and give himself over to the action, to the tremendous sweep of the story as O'Neill tells it.

RING LARDNER

Collected Short Stories

(As broadcast October 16, 1955)

W. CABELL GREET

•

CHARLES POORE

•

LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: Perhaps any reappraisal of Ring Lardner ought to start with the fact that he was a sports writer who undertook to be a humorist, as most of them do, but who went ahead and became a short story writer.

Greet: Yes, and I think the most effective satirist of American life that I know of.

Bryson: But satirists generally give you a kind of dismal and gritty picture of the world, don't they?

Greet: Well, I can't think of many fine characters in Lardner's galaxy, although there are a few.

Poore: Oh, I think there are a great many very agreeable ones.

Bryson: Not just because they're funny?

Poore: No, because they're people that Lardner admired or that he was on the side of.

Bryson: Which do you mean—admired, or was on the side of? He certainly was on the side of his ballplayers who couldn't speak very good English but could hit a ball.

Poore: The men he regretted sending down to defeat in his stories. He was going to send them down to defeat anyway, but he gave them a certain gallantry in action.

Bryson: By "defeat" do you mean that life was too much for these simple-hearted athletic characters?

Poore: No, simply that the situations he got them into were too hard for them.

Greet: Mr. Poore, is this *tragedy* we're talking of?

Poore: It's melodrama we're talking about, Mr. Greet.

Bryson: Well, now, take a very typical Lardner story, *Alibi Ike*. That's certainly typical of his baseball stories, isn't it?

Poore: It's really, in a way, typical of all his stories. All the elements of everything he ever wrote are in that.

Bryson: *Alibi Ike* is kind of a good fellow, and he comes out pretty well after all.

Greet: He comes out unchanged.

Bryson: That's an important point: nothing ever changes in Ring Lardner's stories.

Poore: No. At some point he simply takes his eye off them.

Greet: Well, I don't see the human soul struggling against adversity in Lardner. I think he gives us the human comedy.

Bryson: Well, yes—human comedy. But take *Alibi Ike*. Here's a ballplayer who, no matter how well he did—and he did exceedingly well—always said "Well, I should have done this" or "I would have done that" or "if something hadn't been in my eye I'd have got two home runs that time instead of only one," and so on. And then he gets into trouble because, when he captures a pretty girl, he goes around giving alibis for not catching a prettier one and he almost loses her.

Greet: But my sympathies are not aroused to the point that I should have wept if he had lost her.

Poore: But haven't you got some sympathy for *her* as a prototype in Lardner? How often the girl in his stories is the sister of a fight manager or the sister of another ballplayer or the sister of somebody else!

Bryson: He doesn't think people meet girls in the sports world any other way.

Poore: He's really Jacobean in his interest in sisters.

Greet: Oh, come, come—it's just the influence of the family on American art; they're the girls you inevitably met if you came from Niles, Michigan.

Bryson: If you were a ballplayer, where did you meet girls except when the manager's wife brought around her sister? I mean girls of that kind. The kind of ballplayer that he talked about was, after all, a fellow who could play ball but couldn't do much else.

Greet: Well, he does say that ballplayers occasionally got mash notes from girls in the stands.

Bryson: But he never wrote a story in which a ballplayer got a mash note, followed it up, and got into trouble. That has happened.

Poore: No, love had a very beneficial effect on his ballplayers. They usually went out and got a couple of triples that day.

Bryson: But why is *Alibi Ike* a story touched with pathos? I'm not quite sure that I get this. After all, Alibi Ike is just a fellow who has a funny habit of always explaining his success in terms of why it wasn't any better. And he *was* very successful.

Poore: Well, Lardner's fundamental concern is with braggarts, and Alibi Ike is simply—or I shouldn't say simply: very complicatedly—a braggart in reverse. He's boasting about all the great things he did, but he's using what we call "understatement" when we talk about British authors.

Greet: Quite. It's like one of the "humor" comedies of Molière or Ben Jonson. Here is a type; Alibi Ike is a type.

Poore: The egotism isn't lessened in any way, but it's given a different twist and made that much more readable. Because the wonderful thing about Lardner is his readability, his ability to hold us. People who don't care about baseball still read those stories because of the fundamental situations in them.

Bryson: You say he was always fascinated by the braggart. He gives you Alibi Ike, who's kind of a good guy and comes out all right; and then he gives you *Champion*, which most people know because of its movie version.

Poore: He gives you the braggart of the theatrical world in *The Love Nest* or in *A Day with Conrad Green*.

Bryson: It's always the braggart, but it's the braggart happy, the braggart minor, the braggart major, the braggart villain, the braggart of every type.

Poore: All of it is under Lardner's omnipotent eye. He's always there to give the braggart his come-uppance.

Bryson: I suppose his most famous story is *Haircut*. Can you tell the plot of it?

Greet: A visitor to a small town has gone into the barber shop, and while he has a shave the barber tells him a story. The barber says they have lost the most amusing character in their town . . .

Bryson: "Jim certainly was a card!"

Poore: "He was a card"—that's the epithet always.

Greet: This is a story of the heroic days of practical jokers.

Bryson: Yes, when the jokes you played with weren't quite so lethal as they are now.

Greet: And this practical joker, like the Champion, first defrauds, tricks, and makes his wife and children terribly unhappy. Remember, he tells them that he's going to meet them at the circus, and the wife and children stand outside the doors for an hour while he's in a bar drinking beer . . .

Bryson: Laughing.

Greet: Laughing. And the kindly doctor—we don't know much about him, except that he's . . .

Bryson: A kind of stranger in town.

Greet: Yes, a stranger who comes along and sees this poor woman and her two children, and takes them into the circus.

Bryson: Which makes the practical joker, of course, an enemy of the doctor.

Greet: And, by a curious turn of fate, this good-for-nothing practical joker, a married man, falls in love with a sweet spinster in the town. She has fallen in love with the doctor. The joker tries to force himself on the woman and she slaps his face and slams the door. He goes off vowing revenge. All of this becomes known, of course, to the village, to the barber . . .

Bryson: The barber is relaying the gossip that everybody in the village knows. The only reason he's telling it is because the man in the chair is a stranger.

Greet: Then an idiot boy is introduced—the whole setup is rather Greek, really—and the young doctor befriends him. Well, the jokester calls up the girl, pretends to be the doctor, and says "Come to my house." The doctor wasn't in town. The girl comes to the house in the evening; the jokester and his cronies give her the raspberry from the hedge where they're hiding, and shout after the girl as she goes home. It was a terrible thing in the village, of course. When the boy, who has blossomed somewhat under the kindness of the doctor, asks "What do you think of that?", the doctor says "He shouldn't be let live, a joker like this." Well, a few days later the practical joker, in search of a companion to go hunting, takes the idiot boy; as the barber says, "It must have been an accident; though why would you take an idiot boy on a hunting expedition?" Because the idiot boy must have shot the practical joker.

Bryson: But have you noticed, as you told the story, that none of these violent things actually happened on stage, so to speak? You see them obliquely, you see them through the gossip of the barber. Now why does this story stick in your head the way it does?

Poore: Well, it almost created a new classic form in this country. After it came out, every undergraduate who wanted to write for the college papers wrote that story and called it something else. And quite a lot of very well known authors have written similar stories—about somebody telling you a great, tragic, significant thing without realizing the implications of what he's saying. Lardner always gives you the feeling in all his stories that these people are pretty despicable. But you and I aren't, are we?

Bryson: You say that as if you had some doubt about Lardner's right to speak of us as "we happy few." Do you resent that in Lardner?

Poore: I should think it's at least one stage this side of complete humanity.

Greet: You don't think it's just part of his satire?

Bryson: You think he's making fun of us for thinking that we belong to the "happy few"?

Poore: No. But his elements are really pure melodrama. Where nineteenth-century melodrama showed us one girl being ordered out into the snow, one widow being deprived of her inheritance, one man

being thrown out of his job unjustly, Lardner takes one character and shows him doing those things to twenty different people.

Bryson: Yes, he has things on a larger scale, because evidently his satirical feeling about humanity is more pervasive. Take a story of another kind — like *The Love Nest*, for instance — that absolutely appalling picture of the woman who wanted to be a great artist but who turns out just to be the slave of a rich man, and who never gets the courage or the chance to break through and be herself.

Poore: Ibsen called that story *A Doll's House*, didn't he?

Bryson: Yes, she's the same type.

Greet: You don't feel at all, as you read these stories, that "there but for the grace of God go I"?

Poore: I feel that all the time, and I wonder why Lardner is taking the trouble to give me absolution.

Bryson: He does give you absolution?

Poore: Oh, yes, he always says "You and I are not like this."

Bryson: Mr. Greet doubts that; he feels a little bit smeared with the grime of the . . .

Greet: Just a little. But I'm sure he believes in life, there's no nihilism here.

Bryson: In spite of the fact that these are the only kinds of living people that he seems to think inhabit the globe, he still believes in life?

Greet: Yes, he does. Hogarth did. Ring Lardner does, too. Perhaps because the characters do; his characters believe in life.

Bryson: But is it because humanity is such a wonderful spectacle for us, we happy few, with their misspelled words and their letters and their wonderful dialect?

Greet: There's no patronizing here.

Bryson: No? Mr. Poore thinks there is.

Poore: Oh, I think there is a great deal of patronizing. The very idea of the Lardner spelling, for instance, is a critique of their pronunciation, their language, their education.

Greet: I think his spelling is a device which he uses to make the reader hear the story rather than read it.

Poore: It goes beyond that. He makes the reader hear the sounds of the person's mind working.

Bryson: But that's very remarkable, isn't it?

Poore: It is.

Bryson: And you think there is in it, however, a touch of contempt?

Poore: I think that, like all writers, he tends to use dialect with what you might call low characters, and either go easy on dialect or leave it out entirely on high characters. I'm trying to think of the doctor in *Haircut*, and I doubt very much that he uses all those wonderful Lardner misspellings.

Greet: Well, there are not many with the gas company clerk in *The Maidsville Minstrel*. In fact, since he was a sports writer, it's interesting to observe that the majority of his characters are *not* in sports.

Bryson: But you know that "minstrel," who was the collector

for a gas company, makes a heart-breaking story, one of the most *touching* short stories I think I ever read. It's about this little fellow who wrote poetry. The only poem—when he found out that people were making fun of him—the only poem that didn't get destroyed was the one he wrote to his wife, because she kept that where he couldn't get at it. Now that seems to me to have a touch of pity in it, Mr. Poore.

Poore: That's right. It happens very frequently; he has a great affection for the man telling the story in *Golden Honeymoon*. And I'm thinking that Lardner wrote the most beautiful line of love poetry ever written in the modern world. It's in *The Big Town*: "He give her a look you could of poured on a waffle."

Bryson: Maybe one of the reasons why you get an affirmative feeling out of all this, in spite of the fact that so many of the characters are contemptible or despicable or just too small, is that somehow or other he gets so much fun out of it. Any man who could think of that phrase must have been happy for at least a week.

Greet: Oh, yes, I hope so.

Poore: He seems always, in his life, to have been happy; certainly he was in his early years with his friends. He loved baseball, for all his making fun of it—and think what he did for baseball.

Bryson: Well, think what he did for literature! And what does that tell us about baseball writers, Mr. Poore? Is it true, as is so often said—after all, you're a newspaper writer, I can ask you this question—is it true that the best writing in newspapers is done by the sports writers?

Poore: I think that can very well be proved, if you select your sports writers, because they write clearly, effectively, and accurately—very quickly after something has happened.

Bryson: They don't have time to get literary?

Poore: No. There is a popular belief that if they had lots of time they would write much better. I don't think so. I think the rule is that what can be clearly conceived can be clearly expressed. But they do train themselves.

Bryson: How did Ring Lardner get it, how did Heywood Broun and Red Smith and some of the other great writers in this tradition get it?

Poore: And Kieran?

Bryson: Kieran, sure. How did they get this wonderful combination of clarity and lightness of touch?

Poore: If they didn't have it, they wouldn't be there.

Bryson: You mean the others failed?

Poore: The failures left to write novels of Southern decadence or something like that, but they didn't remain baseball writers; they couldn't.

Greet: Of course, the sports writer always has something to write *about*.

Poore: Oh, he's got a wonderful plot.

Bryson: I know he's got drama. But at the same time, the things that you enjoy most in Red Smith or that you did enjoy in Ring Lardner are not the dramatic effects, they're the effects in style and character creation.

Poore: But style and substance are one, because the play-by-play account of a game in *You Know Me Al* or *Alibi Ike* is really exciting.

Bryson: Of course they're exciting, but would Ring Lardner last on the excitement of his stories alone? I don't think he would; I think he'll last for other qualities.

Greet: He will last, I think, as a technician. Not only have you here the well-made short story, again and again, in different forms, but you have a man who makes his characters speak. And I don't know anyone else, in the whole range of English literature, who does this more successfully.

Bryson: Well, I suppose that some day baseball might pass—it would strike terror into the hearts of a good many millions of Americans if it ever did—but I suspect that Ring Lardner's human beings would survive it.

MORRIS RAPHAEL COHEN

American Thought

(As broadcast October 23, 1955)

D. W. BROGAN

• ERNEST NAGEL

• LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: I think since Morris Raphael Cohen's death that he has been talked about mostly as a great teacher. But one wonders, since he was a serious philosopher of considerable production, if, as time goes on, he may not be thought of as a constructive philosopher rather than as a teacher. I don't say "merely as a teacher."

Nagel: I'm not sure whether the type of analyses that Cohen was interested in will continue to interest future generations, but there's no doubt about his impact upon those who were in his classroom. On the other hand, I take it that we're interested in Mr. Cohen today because of his comment on American life.

Bryson: He was a conscious and systematic critic of American life, wasn't he? And wouldn't you say that that was more important than his technical philosophic work?

Nagel: It's hard to evaluate the relative importance of that. I think he contributed a great deal to the development of a responsible philosophy in this country; at the same time, he was also a very important figure in the development of a critical liberalism in this country.

Brogan: I'm not a philosopher and consequently my opinion of his philosophical works is probably worthless. I haven't got any.

Bryson: But you're a consumer of philosophy, aren't you?

Brogan: Yes, but the consumer's choice in certain fields has only very limited value. Secondly, I didn't know him. I met him, but I never heard him lecture and I wasn't a pupil. So the only ideas I can

have about him are ideas complementing his articles and books, specifically this one, which is a posthumous book and which is about a subject that does interest me: the character of American culture. It's called *American Thought*. It's not a history of American thought in the ordinary sense, with doctrines laid out and "this man said this" and "this man said that"; it is a criticism of the way Americans think. That's how I see the book — what American institutions do to make people think the way they do.

Bryson: It's a series of connected, not unrelated but connected essays on various aspects of American thought. Quite systematic in that sense and, of course, just on that account quite uneven.

Nagel: Quite uneven. Of course, the conception of the book was rather vast and overambitious. At the same time, this is not simply an outsider commenting upon various phases of American life, but one who was integrally involved in the American scene and who offered a perspective for evaluating what was going on in the intellectual life of the country.

Bryson: But from a special point of view. After all, he was a very typical American in some ways, being a European in his earlier background — I mean his traditional family background; at the same time, he was not a typical American because he seems always to have been, well, less in love with America than are most people whose families have come from somewhere else.

Nagel: Well, he certainly was a critic of America.

Bryson: Yes, and a very severe one at times. But a very just one, too, I suppose?

Nagel: Perhaps many of the things that he had to say, which were written some twenty or thirty years ago, no longer have the point and the cogency that they appeared to have at the time he wrote them. But in the twenties and the early thirties, his comments on the judicial system in this country, on economic development, seemed to have a great deal of force and appositeness.

Bryson: And on religion and art. The scope of the man, the true philosopher, is universality.

Brogan: I think that this book really represents two chronological levels. Some of it was obviously written in the twenties and obviously not revised; some of it was obviously written, let us say, in the late thirties and is therefore more recent. It's in some ways a nuisance, in other ways it's an asset. You can see Cohen's mind moving on two different chronological levels, and that in itself is an illustration of changes in the American temper and intellectual atmosphere, which he illustrates innocently. He doesn't intend to. This is a posthumous book; if he'd revised it, you wouldn't get this double witness to changes.

Bryson: Or to his growth.

Brogan: And, as Mr. Nagel points out, some of the problems he dealt with in the twenties and thirties are no longer living problems; others remain. What I found extremely interesting when I read the book some time ago was the degree to which some of these criticisms were still valid and others were dead.

Nagel: In addition to that, there have been influences on the

American scene which Cohen, I think, ignored—partly because he stopped reading after a certain point and no longer took seriously further contributions to the subjects which he was discussing in this particular book.

Bryson: You called it his comment on the intellectual life of America. You would include in that a very intellectual attitude toward religion?

Nagel: I think he was interested in religion partly as a cult or as a ritual, and partly as a rationalization of human values. His criticism of a great deal of theological literature was that it did not do this with the seriousness and sense of responsibility that the subject required.

Bryson: Wouldn't you say that he thought we Americans took religion with too much enthusiasm and not enough seriousness?

Nagel: Yes, I think that certainly would have been his general impression.

Brogan: I think there's a special attitude here. First of all, he is a philosopher who looks at religion from a philosophical point of view. Secondly, in this book he's concerned with a type of religious problem which really is not very typical today—the old qualms about evolution and so on. At the same time, and this is much more permanent, he is concerned with a typical American problem which goes back to the eighteenth century and remains with Americans—namely, that attitude toward religion which, from a European point of view, is serious about being respectful. You all know the famous explanation of why Calvinist theology died in Boston: no man who was born in Boston needed to be born again. Well, that may be true. I'm very fond of Boston. But it's not an idea that comes naturally to a person brought up in Europe, who perhaps doesn't take Boston seriously enough and perhaps takes religion more seriously. It seems to me that he finds American religion lacking in philosophical content and lacking in theology. It's about man, not about God—and religion is about God or it's nothing, it's empty, it's meaningless, it's just feeling cheerful.

Nagel: I think one point ought to be added here: although Cohen was interested in theology, he was interested in theology as a philosopher—that is, insofar as theology is concerned with certain major issues with which philosophy is also concerned. I think it's important to make this point, because it certainly is impossible to interpret Cohen as a person who had religious commitments. His interests in theology did not stem from a desire to establish something about the nature of the universe which would indicate that in some way it is so organized as to support human aspirations.

Bryson: Well, he rejected the mystic; he also rejected the reform elements, the do-good elements.

Brogan: I think one of Cohen's most significant statements is "there's no evidence that the universe was constructed for man's comfort." But I think one reason why he disliked the non-intellectual character of American popular religion—and it's a guess on my part—was that most other people ask only the fundamental questions, while American popular religion doesn't ask them at all. He says the

average apologist escapes one horn of the dilemma by impaling himself on both. But his sympathy with Santayana, I think, arises from the fact that both were people who thought that certain basic questions *should* be asked, that religion had traditionally asked them but had given the wrong answers, and that nowadays not even religion asked them. Each thought philosophy ought to ask non-anthropocentric questions, questions about the nature of the whole world, even if the answers not only don't comfort man, but have nothing to do with man.

Nagel: I agree entirely. I think Cohen believed that many theologies were an attempt to deal with the larger issues which are often fairly remote from the daily concerns of human beings, but which nevertheless provide a background against which human beings can evaluate their own destinies.

Bryson: But isn't that related to his whole position in philosophy? Didn't he think that American philosophy was also becoming, as Mr. Brogan says, anthropocentric and therefore not truly philosophical?

Nagel: In the main, his criticism of some of the outstanding figures in American thought—those who perhaps have received the greatest amount of popular attention—was that they have not kept their eyes on the fundamental major issues with which philosophy traditionally has been concerned.

Bryson: That's true criticism, isn't it? Couldn't you say that William James and John Dewey and people of that sort discarded these questions?

Nagel: Of course you can select your individuals in such a way that they will confirm the criticism, but Cohen, I think, neglected a number of others. For example, I'm not sure whether you can call Santayana an American philosopher . . .

Bryson: You can if you can call Cohen an American philosopher!

Nagel: Well, perhaps. Santayana so regarded himself. His philosophical writings were mainly done in this country. A great deal of cosmological speculation by professional philosophers has been going on which Cohen didn't take seriously because he didn't think that they were contributions to positive knowledge. But I do think that many of his criticisms directed towards a specific group of people who had a great deal of public influence are sound.

Brogan: Mr. Nagel is very much better qualified than I can possibly be, because he knows the American philosophical field in a way that I don't, and I'm glad to hear that there's so much cosmological speculation. One of Cohen's grievances is that if you're a—I won't say if you're a disciple of John Dewey, because that begs the question—but if you're a disciple of "Deweyism," these questions not only cap the answer but shouldn't be asked; they can have no utility; they don't help. And I don't think Cohen thought that philosophy was bound to help. It was part of the dignity of man to try to find out, even if the answer was profoundly disconcerting to any student of the universe. In one of the new systems of logic, he admired—as a mathematician by origin—the ingenuity, the symmetry, and so on;

although tentatively a philosophy that attempted to explain how a man could be comfortable in the world, neither this nor its symmetry was in the deepest sense a philosophical attitude to the tragic problem of man alive in the world.

Nagel: Cohen was rather fond of quoting a remark of the late Justice Holmes that "no man can count himself civilized unless he has at some time examined his first principles." His conception of an adequate philosophy was one which did not deal simply with immediate contemporary issues, but which in some way tried to use contemporary material to illustrate or to fortify, or perhaps to contradict, some general assumptions about the way in which the world wags.

Bryson: Wasn't he really finding, although I don't know that he ever put it quite this way, a certain basic inconsistency in the development of American thought? On the one hand, we think so much about our being scientific, which of course means to find the right answer to a question no matter what happens, while on the other hand we seem to say in our philosophy, "Well, it matters a great deal what the answer may be, and we're not interested in questions unless they affect us." That seems to me about as unscientific as a philosophy can get. It troubled him, didn't it?

Nagel: It did trouble him, but, you know, there was a kind of a double strain in the man. On the one hand, he often regarded himself as being a humanist, a person who was concerned with human weal.

Bryson: And yet his dislike of "do-gooders" and his weakness in esthetics, which I think you would agree to . . .

Nagel: I do.

Bryson: Doesn't make him much of a humanist, does it?

Nagel: No, not in that sense, but a humanist perhaps in the larger sense of one who is concerned with the various aspirations and modes of expression that human beings manifest. In that sense he was a humanist.

Nagel: I agree with that.

Brogan: His esthetics are irrelevant and sometimes just wrong. I mean, you can't imagine a man with sensitive literary taste making the travesty of Henry James that you get here. But, again, he was a mathematician and mathematicians tell me — and I'm willing to believe them — that there's a great esthetic beauty in pure mathematics. And when he makes his protest that in American life there was no place for the theory of numbers, he is perhaps expressing what was his basic esthetic principle, namely, the beauty of mathematics. He doesn't say that the theory of numbers is any good to anybody, merely that it is one of the great achievements of the human mind and has its own symmetry and beauty. Perhaps it would have been wiser if this book had been revised, if he had eliminated these thin jejune judgments on the visual arts, which are very poor, and on literature, which are not very original, and had expounded instead, as Whitehead tried to do, the esthetics of mathematics. I don't know how good a mathematician he was, though he started as one.

Nagel: Yes, he started as one, but I think many of his comments

upon the neglect of certain subjects are really the comments of a moralist rather than of a person who was primarily interested in that kind of material. For example, in the early years of the present century Cohen was one of the men who helped to make known, at least to his students, what is called mathematical symbolic logic. But he himself didn't contribute to the subject.

Bryson: Did he teach it brilliantly?

Nagel: He never taught symbolic logic. He declined to give a course in the subject on the ground that undergraduates really were not prepared to follow it.

Bryson: And he thought it was a special sin in the American undergraduate *not* to be able to follow it, didn't he? Didn't he always have the illusion that if he had been teaching at the Sorbonne or at Heidelberg, the undergraduates would have been up to symbolic logic?

Nagel: Well, not entirely. I started to say a little while ago that there was this double strain in the man. On the one hand, he had a genuine humane concern with human institutions and human aspirations; on the other hand, he had a strong leaning towards a scientific approach to human problems, which sometimes is not entirely compatible with the other. And there was this constant struggle, I think, between his interest in showing the relevance for the human good of certain types of disinterested study, and his commitment to studying certain things irrespective of what they contributed to the immediate practical scene.

Brogan: I should have thought that he also felt that the American insistence on the practical result actually upset any rational scale of values, even in this field of scientific endeavor. For example, many Americans think of Edison as a scientist. Well, from Cohen's point of view he wasn't a scientist, he was a man who invented gadgets. Many Americans will think the most important thing Einstein ever did was to write to F.D.R. about the atom bomb, and this is where I'd rather agree with Mr. Bryson. I think Cohen felt the American educational system led people out into the world with the idea that Edison was a scientist and that the most important thing about Einstein was that he made the atom bomb. Then he had the illusion—it's partly illusion, anyway—that if he'd been teaching in Göttingen or in Oxford or in Paris, he would not have had to fight against this Philistinism. I think he took a certain romantic view of Europe, which, if he'd had to live there, he wouldn't quite have shared so firmly; he wouldn't quite have believed in this golden academic world in which the theory of numbers, in which pure esthetics, with no particular content, was everybody's meat. It's an old story. A great friend of mine, Alfred Kazin, in his admirable book greatly exaggerates that quality in the University of Berlin. Stresemann was a much less cultivated person than J. P. Morgan, for example. I have a feeling that wherever Cohen went, people would not have lived up to this austere, ascetic view of what philosophy is or what life is about.

Nagel: His own experience, I think, was relatively limited for most of his life. He taught undergraduates during almost his entire

academic career. He did do a little graduate instruction, but at a time in his life when new winds of doctrine were blown across the scene and he felt that he was no longer making contact with students.

Bryson: I suppose every man is allowed one romanticism, and we ought to give him his romanticism about European education.

Nagel: Yes, it's nice to have a golden age somewhere.

Brogan: I think he would have been disillusioned if he had gone to Oxford after all. He would have had to teach undergraduates. I could name several very eminent Oxford philosophers who had much more undergraduate teaching than he could have possibly had to do at City College, and sometimes with not very bright pupils; and I could name a few Oxford colleges which might have sent him back to City College with a good deal of, well, relief.

Bryson: Don't destroy this rosy picture of European education that we have in America, Mr. Brogan; although you know so much about America, don't let us . . .

Brogan: I don't think Cohen knew much about Europe! I don't think he's entirely wrong, but, I must say, if you contrast the harshness of his criticism of American education with his golden view of European education . . .

Nagel: I think, nevertheless, that Cohen, even in his criticism of American education, was speaking as an exponent of a liberal view of life.

Bryson: I'm sure he was, and I'm sure that in his books—not only in his memory but in his books—there is something of substantial importance to American culture.

ELLEN GLASGOW

The Romantic Comedians

(As broadcast October 30, 1955)

J. DONALD ADAMS • VIRGILIA PETERSON • LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: Ellen Glasgow seems to be suffering the normal dip in reputation which comes to all first-rate writers some years after their deaths. And that's a pretty good time to try to make a guess as to when she will come out of it, which she undoubtedly will, how far she'll go, and what she will finally be remembered as. Now one thinks of her mostly as a satirist.

Peterson: I think she was undoubtedly a satirist, but she herself said what she wanted to do—and I believe she accomplished all of it. She said: "I would write of all the harsher realities beneath manners, beneath social customs, beneath the poetry of the past and the romantic nostalgia of the present." She really sought to touch reality, the reality of psychology, the reality of the human heart.

Bryson: And of course this had peculiar importance to her, because she grew up in Richmond, Virginia, at a time when these things that she talks about—nostalgia for the past and sentimentality about the present—were in her opinion a curse on the life of the people she knew.

Peterson: Well, she wanted to substitute facts for sanctified fallacies.

Adams: I think she can decidedly be called a novelist of character.

Bryson: Not merely a satirist?

Adams: No. I think she has—and this is never to be forgotten—she has a tragic sense of life, a very deep one, along with her wit.

Bryson: It's most apparent in her first group of novels, which were not about the good families of Virginia but rather about, as she called them, the good people—novels like *Barren Ground*. But when she really tackled her own class, as she does in *The Romantic Comedians*, it seems to me that the satire is pretty overpowering.

Peterson: It doesn't overpower me. I think that when you have to knock down a genteel code—a genteel tradition of hypocrisy, really, in which everybody concealed his feelings behind an iron corset to keep others from finding out—when you have to knock all that down, you must use every weapon at your command. And I believe that she uses compassion, too.

Bryson: Maybe she does, but I don't feel it so much in this book. Here you have a distinguished old man, a great Virginia lawyer, after his widowhood falling in love with a girl. Let's see—Judge Honeywell was sixty-five and Annabel was twenty-three. She marries him only for his money and practically tells him so. At the end of a year, of course, the marriage has gone completely on the rocks, all of the hypocrisies and conceits and concealments have come out, and the judge learns that she can't even stand him any more. She finds another young man—she's had others before—who seems to her to offer life and love, and with complete heartlessness and brutality she leaves the old judge. He says he'll always take care of her, and retreats into what one expects to be a kind of somnolent old age—but April is stirring in him again at the end of the book. At sixty-six he still can feel the breeze and hear the whispering of the April leaves. Isn't there a little satire in that? The old man really didn't learn his lesson.

Adams: No, I don't think any of us ever really does. But I do feel that there is a measure of compassion in the book. I also think that in this particular novel she gives freer rein to the comic spirit than she does in any other—even more so, perhaps, than in the other books in this trilogy, *They Stooped to Folly* and *The Sheltered Life* . . .

Bryson: Although they deal with the same kind of people.

Adams: The very same.

Bryson: But there's a double satire here: she's not only satirizing the pretenses of Virginia society, as she sees them, but also the absolutely incorrigible romanticism of men. She is wickedly perceptive about men.

Peterson: Well, yes, of course she's wickedly perceptive about men, but she doesn't only satirize poor Judge Honeywell. I think she makes him into an almost tragic character. She shows that it is ridiculous of a man of sixty-five to fall for this sample of flaming youth, this poverty-stricken but absolutely glamorous and divinely frivolous young girl. But in the process of the sacrifices he has to make after he has married her, he finds his love for this young girl—whether it's paternalistic or whatever it is—deepening to such an extent that he has moments when he realizes that if he could just make her happy he would give up everything: every satisfaction, even his pride; everything he has stood for all his life. And only then does he think that perhaps he has understood the meaning of life, the ultimate giving away of yourself in a love for someone else. I think Miss Glasgow is very serious about that.

Bryson: That's exactly where one can best examine her moral purpose. Because Judge Honeywell realizes that if he could just make Annabel happy, no matter at what cost, it would really be the meaning of life—to love without expectation of anything for oneself, except the joy of having made the other person happy.

Peterson: Which is a pretty Christian principle.

Bryson: It's a wonderful principle, but that's what I'm talking about: she has given Judge Honeywell this insight at the end of the book; he has really done all that—he has offered Annabel her freedom; he is not going to put anything in the way; he's going to see, if he can, that she's not disgraced by her unfaithfulness (she has run away with this fellow, even without a divorce). He's done exactly those things that provide, in his view, the meaning of life. But he doesn't feel any divinity himself—he just feels tired and thinks how nice the nurse is: why didn't he marry her?

Adams: You don't think, then, that Miss Glasgow gives him the benefit of his good impulse? He gets no reward?

Bryson: Well, he carries out the good impulse. Maybe that's all there is to it. But I don't think he has any feeling that he understands what has happened. He's just done it because he's a gentleman.

Adams: Yes, I think that's perhaps true.

Bryson: Well, then, where is this great moral insight that he was promised?

Peterson: He had two or three moments of it, and most of us are not given more than two or three moments of true moral insight in the course of sixty-five years, are we?

Bryson: But those moments don't seem to match the times when he performs his great virtuous and generous actions. He has been the most thorough Virginia gentleman that anybody could be. He's given this girl everything: protection, money, understanding, and forgiveness, although she's given him nothing; she'd really treated him very badly. All he feels is: Well, I'm awfully tired, and isn't it wonderful to be so well taken care of by this nurse, and isn't she pretty? April is again stirring in the wind.

Adams: When we leave him, his last words are, "I am feeling almost as young as I felt last year."

Bryson: At sixty-six!

Peterson: He was very ill by this time and had been through these shattering emotions. He had gone up to New York to try and bring back this wayward young bride and had been unable to, had walked through the streets of New York, thinking of the terrible loneliness that he for the first time understood to the bottom—the loneliness of the stars and the universe, of people dying at dawn, of city streets, the loneliness of everything on God's earth—and he had suffered a great deal. I think, myself, that by the time he got to bed and the nurse was giving him a hot toddy, he had a perfect right to subside and get off his moral high horse.

Bryson: Well, I do, too; but it seems to me that she denies him the greatest satisfaction that she'd promised him and reduces him again to a rather small scale. He's just a pitiful human being, not a tragic character.

Peterson: Don't you think most of us are that, even though we have our moments?

Bryson: Of course! But now you're talking realism, you're not talking literature.

Peterson: But she *is* a realist. Above all, that's what she set out to be.

Adams: I think she quotes approvingly from someone who reviewed the book and found in Judge Honeywell Man Eternal. Well, that's what I think she leaves us with, that sense of him. It seems to me that she does better than practically any novelist that I can think of, man or woman, in getting at the inner springs of men—more so even than Jane Austen, with whom she has a great deal in common.

Bryson: I would say that only Meredith in one book, perhaps—*The Egoist*—goes deeper into men. But for a woman to be even the second deepest plumb of the male character is a miraculous feat. How did she know so much about men?

Peterson: She had an exacerbated sensitivity, a vulnerability to everyone; she was an extremely thin-skinned, almost skinless, person. I believe that one of the reasons she cloaked everything in irony and satire was because she had to; I don't think anyone could remain as raw as she was. She had her pride and she had her conventional exterior of a lady of breeding and self-control, and so she used irony and satire as a means of showing how much she knew about the heart, rather than just lay it bare, which would have been intolerable. But about Judge Honeywell—she wasn't so cruel to him, either. It was a tragedy. Because, as she says, "Though he had loved three women, he had never thrilled to the Olympian ecstasy—or was it merely the Hungarian rhapsody?—of passion." But when he married this unfortunate fibbertigibbet, he did begin to feel, at that late period in his life, a genuine passion.

Bryson: When it was too late.

Peterson: Too late.

Bryson: I'm sure we've never had in America, and I doubt if we've ever had in English, a novelist more consistently witty. Her wit is almost tiresome, it's so incessant; her sparkle, her grace of language, is just beyond admiration. And you think this wit is a

defense against the slings and arrows of fortune that she suffered herself?

Peterson: You are given to understand that in her own book about herself, *The Woman Within*, which came out just last year, nine years after her death. It was held up until the executors of the will felt it possible to let it be published. In that, she exposes herself as in nothing else; you realize how much she suffered as a human being, how fearful she was and how terribly proud. For one thing, she was deaf. I think you would find it very hard to encounter anyone nowadays for whom deafness meant such an agony of humiliation, but she would go across the street rather than meet a friend for fear she wouldn't hear what the friend said. I think this is a symbol of the humiliation that she would have felt all along the line if anyone had seen weakness in her or discovered how they could hurt her. And with a brilliant mind, of course, this was the way to clothe that kind of sensitivity.

Adams: I think that she sometimes even magnified to herself the loss which deafness meant to her, and used it as a sort of defense. But to go back to the book which she wrote about her own life: I think if any further evidence were needed—which it isn't, of course—that most novels are exceedingly autobiographical, that book certainly clinches the idea.

Bryson: Well, then, she must have had at least one traumatic experience involving the attentions of an old man—because that is the theme that runs through a lot of her books.

Peterson: She had one terrible experience when she was a very young woman and came up to New York with her first manuscript, which never saw the light of day. She had answered an advertisement saying: "Literary agent. Expert counsel for \$50." Her sister sent her the money—she had very little of her own—and she went to see the man. He made advances to her, very bold, crude advances; she fled out of there, feeling completely stripped and humiliated, and burned the manuscript and never quite recovered, I think, from that shock.

Adams: I think her feeling toward men was also influenced to considerable extent by her mental attitude. I was very much amused when I was looking through *The Woman Within* the other night to find that when she met the second man—you remember, what did she call him?—Harold . . .

Bryson: The second man she was in love with.

Adams: She was very much attracted to him, and yet she says: "I observed him for an instant over my cocktail, wondering whether he could be used effectively in a comedy of manners."

Bryson: That's my reason for not being so terribly sorry for Miss Glasgow, as one can be for certain types of writers who have to put their tears into their books. Anyone who can achieve the kind of sentences and the kind of sparkling—well, *cutting*—remarks about people that she can is pretty lucky. Most people suffer without being able to be funny about it.

Peterson: Certainly, it's lucky. But she had a very, may I say, mature contempt for the pursuit of happiness as a goal in itself, and

that of course is the justification for this book. She says: "For it seemed that even the insidious irony of the modern point of view had scarcely damaged the popular superstition that love and happiness are interchangeable terms. Old and young and perennially middle-aged, the world is still enslaved by this immemorial illusion, for all this company of happiness hunters appear to be little better than a troop of romantic comedians." She did not believe that love and happiness were interchangeable. And of course they are not. This is the great American myth which she was busy exploding, along with the social manners of the period.

Bryson: It wasn't only Virginia that suffered here, it was men and women—and especially *American* men and women. You're justified in saying that she was something more than a novelist of manners or a satirist, because she was really a novelist of character. Judge Honeywell is not merely a Virginia gentleman, he's Man—he's the male animal from the very beginning.

Adams: I think some of the other characters besides the Judge are worth a moment's thought. She often says something which seems to me to carry with it a great deal of profound understanding, as when she has Mrs. Bredalbane say: "Human beings, especially youthful human beings, are not made to be clung to; it brings out their worst qualities."

Peterson: Mrs. Bredalbane is the Judge's twin sister, a lady who had a scandal in her youth and left Queenborough, which is Miss Glasgow's name for Richmond, but had come back . . .

Bryson: After four husbands and the acquisition of several million dollars.

Peterson: Ellen Glasgow says about her return that the youth of Queenborough "treated her scarlet letter less as the badge of shame than as some foreign decoration for distinguished service."

Bryson: And there's that wonderful scene in which Mrs. Bredalbane tells her brother—she's always trying to give him good advice, which he would have done well to follow—that really her past was not so scarlet as Queenborough thought, but for Heaven's sake not to tell anybody.

Peterson: I don't think Miss Glasgow was entirely in favor of all the changes from the older generation to the younger, because in depicting Annabel she certainly impales her as a hopeless egoist and a creature without the discipline and the breeding of a lady. Somewhere in *The Woman Within* she says, "America has mellowed too quickly and softened before it was ripe." I think that's a very dignified comment on what happened in America during Miss Glasgow's lifetime.

Bryson: Yes, this other theme is very much on her mind. She doesn't think that just because the old should be abandoned, the new is necessarily good.

Adams: There's one statement in *The Woman Within* that puzzles me a bit. She says, "Doesn't all experience crumble in the end into mere literary material?"

Bryson: I wonder just at what point in her life she wrote that?

Adams: It was toward the very end of her life.

Bryson: There I think she's complaining even about her compensations.

Peterson: Well, she was fifty-two when she wrote *The Romantic Comedians*, which was the first of that series of novels about Richmond society; she was already through with love; she was identified with an older generation. And although she'd been a rebel in her youth and stood for some changes, she did not stand for a change in decorum.

Bryson: Or in basic moral values. She didn't believe that sincerity and fidelity and honesty and kindness should go out of the world.

Adams: Oh, by no means.

Bryson: Well, where are you going to put her now? When she comes back into her own, is she going to be a great novelist or just one of the good novelists that are more or less forgotten? What's the reappraisal?

Adams: I think perhaps she misses the very top, but I don't think she stands far below it. I don't think Jane Austen really belongs on the highest level either.

Bryson: Those are dangerous words, Mr. Adams!

Adams: I admire Jane Austen's work but I see elements lacking in it. The parallel between them is interesting, because they both wrote about a provincial society.

Peterson: I prefer her to Jane Austen.

Bryson: But you think that's where she'll be put—in a group of which Jane Austen is one of the shining examples?

Adams: Yes, I do. I think there's something lasting in her work as a novelist of character.

Bryson: Will she ever be a cult the way Jane Austen is?

Adams: No, I think not.

Bryson: Well, if it is true that style is what makes a book last, even though all the manners that it satirizes have disappeared, and if it has real humanity in it, I should say that she's destined for a kind of immortality because she has a wit which is almost incredible, almost wearisome in its absolutely unbroken brilliance.

THORSTEIN VEBLEN

The Theory of the Leisure Class

(As broadcast November 6, 1955)

RICHARD HOFSTADTER • ERIC LARRABEE • LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: I recall the enormous impact of Veblen's *The Theory of the Leisure Class* on my generation of undergraduates, not very

long after it was published, but it's hard for me to see anything revolutionary in the book now.

Hofstadter: I think we fail to see why Veblen was revolutionary because we've so much absorbed the essential matter of what he had to say.

Bryson: We just take it now as commonplace?

Hofstadter: Pretty much so. Besides, we think of him as belonging to an earlier time, and he *did* belong to one that was a long time ago. Veblen was born before the Civil War and grew up in the great post-Civil War period of industrial expansion, when millionaires were sprouting on every side and when a lot of them were riotously spending their new-found means. He saw the harshest aspects of that society—its vulgarity, its display—and he satirized it and moralized about it. I think he told us so much that we've come to behave differently; he became an influence on us and for that very reason ceased to be a prophet.

Larrabee: We are all Veblenites in spite of ourselves. The phrase "conspicuous consumption," among his many wonderful ones, has so passed into the national consciousness that we are now trying very hard to be inconspicuous in our consumption.

Bryson: You mean that he's reformed us?

Larrabee: We haven't been entirely reformed.

Bryson: There are still people who think that unless the car they're driving is longer and bigger than it really needs to be, they somehow have to be ashamed of it?

Larrabee: Yes, as well as people who feel exactly the opposite: unless their car is shorter, more European, more stripped down to what they suppose to be its functional elements, they are uncomfortable.

Bryson: But what would Veblen have said about this: on Fifth Avenue the other day I saw a very small, very highly polished Ford car being driven by a very expensively-uniformed chauffeur; is that conspicuous waste, too?

Hofstadter: I think Veblen would have been mystified by this combination of divergent strains, but in part it's his own influence that has complicated us in this way. In his day people consumed conspicuously without any qualifications. Veblen saw them from the standpoint of a Norwegian immigrant who had been raised in simplicity and who could never understand the luxurious society of his time. To him, these people were trying to contribute something to their own personal aggrandizement through their manner of consumption. He was one of the first economists—though he was also a sociologist—who talked about consumption not as a formal element in the marginal utility theory of economics, but as a way in which people actually behaved; this violated some of the rules.

Larrabee: It was a wonderful device for getting a scholarly and analytical grip on the society of his time. Nowadays I think one has a very different experience with this book. You plow through a certain amount of learning which now seems very out-of-date, you see this image of society that you're talking about, Mr. Hofstadter, and you see that each of his references to a kind of anthropology that surely

went out of fashion not long afterwards was a device for getting at the qualities of this predatory society which he so much detested.

Bryson: And the fact that his anthropology has been discarded by competent people in the field doesn't invalidate his statement at all, does it? I mean that his description is still sound, even though he may have given bad reasons for it.

Larrabee: Yes, I think that's true, and I think it is also true that we should be a little sympathetic to the book. Here, after all, is a man who, for all his awkwardness, was striving to make a reputation; he thought it necessary—perhaps rightly, perhaps wrongly—to use a large, ponderous apparatus of learning.

Bryson: But this ponderous learning of his is shot through with marvelous irony and wit, with surprising turns of phrase. He got off the ground in spite of the weight of learning that he carried.

Hofstadter: An awkward stylist, but a very great phrase-maker. His very definition of leisure as "non-productive consumption of time," his sardonic references to leisure considered as an employment, his references to the "conspicuous subservience of servants," his definition of neighbors as "unsympathetic observers of one's everyday life"—all these are evidence of a remarkable wit, even if he did have a great deal of trouble with style and long-range exposition.

Bryson: You said that he had ceased being a prophet because he had succeeded in becoming an influence. What did he prophesy?

Hofstadter: I think he prophesied rather vaguely a continuation of the kind of luxurious indulgence that he saw flourishing around him. Veblen had no hope. He was not prophesying, at least in this phase of his life, any social revolution. He was almost sadistically threatening his readers with the idea that there never would be any improvement in this sort of thing; this was the mood that he sustained during the greater part of his life.

Larrabee: But don't you find in this book distinct foretastes of the admiration he felt for the hard-headed, practical, engineering-minded person, which later developed into a theory that such people would take control of American life?

Bryson: And have they taken control, Mr. Larrabee?

Larrabee: Well, I would say that in an odd way they have, only I should qualify it. Veblen said they would take control by the formation of—a word he used that now seems more inappropriate than it did at the time—"a soviet of technicians."

Bryson: That was before "soviet" became a dirty word.

Larrabee: It was a combative word even then, but it wasn't quite as pejorative as it is now. The engineers of the time certainly rejected having this role thrust upon them, but one man did assume the role, a man who is like Veblen in many ways—Henry Ford, who became a kind of one-man soviet of engineers. Coming, as Veblen did, from an ascetic, puritan, semi-rural background and wishing to throw it off, wishing to use his mechanical gifts to provide the people he had known in their want with something better, Ford changed the world that Veblen wrote about.

Bryson: So that everybody now can be conspicuously wasteful?

Larrabee: Yes, I would say so.

Bryson: His prophecy was wrong when he said that things were always going to be the same; he failed to see that the engineers *would* take over and make this conspicuous consumption a common experience?

Hofstadter: I think that's so. There are certainly inklings in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* of the admiration for workmanship and engineering that flowers in some of Veblen's later books. He believed that we are all implanted with what he called an instinct of workmanship, but, if I may paraphrase Rousseau, he thought that man was everywhere born workmanlike and everywhere aspired to be leisurely, perhaps lazy, and certainly luxurious. This, of course, he traced to the influence of the upper classes in American society and . . .

Bryson: Whom he regarded as vulgar.

Hofstadter: To the predatory and vulgar rich, and to the fact that all the successive ranks below them emulated them. He was convinced that the individual in each and every class attempted to emulate the classes above him and pride himself over the classes below.

Larrabee: I wonder if this isn't still somewhat true? The new leisure class Veblen didn't foresee, nor did he foresee the world we live in, where most of us can afford wasteful activities of one kind or another.

Bryson: We can afford motor cars that are bigger and brighter than they really need to be.

Larrabee: Indeed we can. And we have created, in the automobile industry, a major productive business which is dependent for its sales almost entirely on the forms of style and fashion and whim which Veblen would have disparaged.

Bryson: But not just for the rich.

Larrabee: For all. But the very people to whom this gift of leisure has been made, the ones who have rendered obsolete Veblen's idea that it was the property of a minority—these people are themselves engaged in emulating the leisure habits of the old aristocratic landed gentry class. I've just come back from a vacation trip through Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, and everywhere by the roadside one sees the hunters who are, at this time of the year, out in full force. Now this is, in some ways, an admirable activity. But in others nothing could be more archaic, more related to the predatory habits that Veblen imputed to the master class of the moneyed, and nothing in many senses of the word could be more wasteful.

Hofstadter: Veblen hated sports, didn't he? It seems to me that I recall his particularly sardonic observations on college football.

Bryson: Which had scarcely been started fifty years ago.

Hofstadter: Yes, but he had some familiarity with it. I remember his having said that football bears the same relation to physical culture that a bullfight does to agriculture. But the trouble with Veblen, it seems to me, is that he had a way of seeing the harsh and the unsympathetic side of almost every human situation. He didn't realize—at least not in this book—the way in which the resentment

of the somewhat less than completely rich could be turned to political uses and could act as a kind of reform balance wheel in society.

Bryson: You think that's what happened?

Hofstadter: I think that's one of the things that happened. I think, too, that the very displeasure of the older rich, who did not feel quite the same need for display as the type of person Veblen was describing, has given us a kind of patrician leadership which has been very useful in our history.

Bryson: The reason I come back to this so often is that in reappraising a man like Veblen, we're reappraising him in terms of what he thought was a carefully exact description of the world as he saw it. That is, you can't judge Veblen merely as a literary figure; he took himself as a scientific figure.

Hofstadter: He much resented, I should imagine, being characterized as a satirist or being taken as a joker. And yet I wonder if in a way that judgement wasn't a fair one? If at the time he was thought to be satirical, while he himself felt that he was actually being coldly objective, of those two judgments I think the judgment of him as a satirist is a fairer one.

Bryson: Is that just because he had an ironic mind, and when he looked at the world he inevitably saw it in an ironic way?

Larrabee: Ironic is a much better word than satirical.

Bryson: Certainly the irony is pervasive in this book.

Larrabee: It's imbedded in the style, in the phrases that he makes out of unexpected juxtapositions such as "trained incapacity." Just from the phrase itself you get the sense of an astringent mind at work.

Bryson: We talk about Veblen as an ascetic and as having (at least I did) certain peasant qualities, as resenting the rich as the European peasant more or less is culturally taught to do; and yet when he takes up the role of women in our kind of society, a kind of reluctant tenderness seems to come into his voice.

Larrabee: This is where I feel a sympathetic side of him coming into play. Not to put him completely in the mold of polarities, but there is a sympathy in Veblen for the predatory or robber baron type. He has a grudging admiration. He thinks of his Viking ancestors and he feels the strength of this kind of character. But he admires also the workmanlike virtue of the productive farmer of the kind that his father was. At the same time, he has the ability to take at something less than face value the striving of the masculine world, and at the very moment when he is attacking the animistic modes of thought, you can see his admiration for another way of thinking sneaking in. When he gets around to talking about women, he wishes to use the upper-class American woman of his time as an illustration of her really gorgeously useless attachment to . . .

Bryson: An example of "trained incapacity."

Larrabee: Yes, a bauble on her husband's crown—the idea of the household as a masculine domain in which the women are equivalent to slaves in their demonstrative uselessness. And yet he goes on to say that women, by virtue of that very position, were able to see the futility of masculine life, to see how much of it was just a

joke, to deplore waste, to deplore war, to deplore the predatory instincts of the rest of the culture. He says women are uniquely equipped in this respect. And I think this is one of Veblen's points that is still quite valid.

Hofstadter: He had a great deal of sympathy with women in this role. He thought of women as being in the unfortunate position of appendages to the dominant money-making males who performed what he called the function of vicarious leisure and vicarious consumption—because with the aid of their wives and their wives' mink coats men could consume a great deal more than they could consume by themselves. In the same way he thought that servants performed these functions, too.

Bryson: But why is it that he never, at any point, seems to understand that if you detach from material production a certain part of your population—women or servants or anybody else—you make possible the development of the arts? He doesn't ever seem to have thought that perhaps some of what he calls this "conspicuous consumption" was the pursuit of refinement and beauty.

Hofstadter: No; here I think that what Mr. Larrabee referred to as his feminine sympathies failed him. He seems not to have believed in the intrinsic existence of an independent esthetic impulse. We always think, in America, that women have been singularly entrusted with our art and culture, and to a great extent they have been, for good historical reasons. Veblen didn't believe in the independent existence of the sense of beauty; he once referred to one's "sense of costliness," as he put it, "masquerading under the name of beauty."

Larrabee: He speaks of taste as being purely a function of other matters, chiefly economical. I find it hard to keep remembering that he was an economist. One thinks of him so often as a man who rambled away in all directions from the given materials of economics.

Hofstadter: He seems to me to be fully as much—perhaps more—a sociologist as an economist. He belonged to a great generation of American thinkers who were trying to break down the boundaries of the various social disciplines, and I think he did so with unusual success. I believe he's had more impact on our sociological than on our distinctively economic thinking.

Bryson: But when you say that he has become an influence and is thereby imbedded in our thinking, would you yourself be a prophet and say that this means a constant decline in his reputation except as specialist?

Hofstadter: No, I think not. I think Veblen is perhaps in the trough of his reputation right now. David Riesman, in the latest book on him, took him down brilliantly, and I don't know that he'll ever fully recover from it. But I think—as we get further away from him, and perhaps a bit out of the conservative mood in which we are now—that we may enjoy him for a certain kind of quaintness, and come once again to appreciate with new freshness the immense impact that he's had on our ways of behaving as well as thinking.

Larrabee: And even if we have absorbed him to the point of outliving him, I don't think his method is for that reason any the

less appropriate. It's a pity, as we can see now in an age of mass consumption, that Veblen himself was such a poor helpless consumer, unable to enjoy or to keep possessions, wearing rough clothes, living in shacks with ramshackle furniture, throwing away books. Such a person—again like Ford—was unable to foresee an age in which people would have to know how to consume, and to consume in large quantities. What we need now, obviously, is a new Veblen. I hope and believe myself that in David Riesman we have found one, although he wouldn't say so himself.

Bryson: That could be, and we'd be very grateful if it were true. I suppose the fate of Veblen is the fate of any teacher: the more successful he is, the more thoroughly he gets forgotten.

EDWIN A. ROBINSON

Collected Poems

(As broadcast November 13, 1955)

WALTER COHEN

• DENVER LINDLEY

• LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: Edwin Arlington Robinson was a poet who leapt suddenly into public notice for a reason that was not at all poetic, and yet he was a man who could be called a poet and almost nothing else.

Cohen: He came to public notice, of course, when Theodore Roosevelt took a personal interest in his second or third book of poetry.

Bryson: And practically saved him from starvation.

Cohen: Yes; he had apparently dedicated himself to a life of starvation in order to create his poetry. "I must be a poet, I can be nothing else," he said very early in his life. And with a devotion that is almost unparalleled in American letters he set himself to be a poet.

Bryson: And to live by his poetry—well, almost. It's the greatest possible contrast with some poets of the modern day, who carry on quite successful careers as highly-respected business and professional men and derive their poetry out of their experience. He derived poetry out of what?

Lindley: He derived poetry out of introspection, I think, as much as anything else. It must have been a dreadful disappointment to him, however, that his early books of poetry received so little attention. I remember Don Marquis saying once that publishing a book of verse was like throwing a flower into the Grand Canyon and waiting for the echo. There were years when that was precisely Robinson's experience.

Cohen: And yet the lack of attention that his poems received could not have been entirely surprising.

Bryson: Why not?

Cohen: Robinson brought an entirely new note into poetry; he flew in the face of everything that was reigning at the time. Of course, what he really brought was his personality. That is the great contribution which Robinson made to poetry: he brought himself, his own vision, to which he was faithful throughout his life. But more than that, all of his mannerisms and his style were entirely different from those of the poets beside whom he hoped to take a place.

Bryson: You accept this, do you, Mr. Lindley? It was a new kind of poetry?

Lindley: It seems to me that it was, within limits, a new kind of poetry.

Bryson: It certainly had its derivations.

Lindley: Yes, there was Browning, who had an especially strong effect on Robinson. What you remember is a voice talking, a highly intelligent voice, with a strong thrust of male intelligence behind it and not much music. I think you don't—at least, I don't—think of Robinson primarily as a lyric poet. He wrote a number of good lyrics, but it seems to me that they express him less completely than the narrative poems and the short dramatic poems.

Cohen: Well, the new note in writing that Robinson brought was the colloquial note, the note which Edgar Lee Masters and Robert Frost developed. In addition, he brought a new kind of nomenclature poetry. When before had people been called Cliff Klingenhagen, Miniver Cheevy, Luke Havergal?

Lindley: Wonderful names!

Cohen: They had all been Guy Vere de Vere until that time.

Bryson: You do remember those names. And why are they characteristic? What is it in Robinson that is suggested by these names? Here's a man, as Mr. Lindley said, of very narrow experience, who spent most of his life almost as a recluse in a New England town. He never married, he had no family, he had no business or professional connections. Is this an imaginary world that he created out of Miniver Cheevy and Roman Bartholow?

Cohen: He did—just as much, it seems to me, as the romantic poets. Robinson opened magic casements. The only difference was that he opened them on the real world. He didn't open them on the world of romance and fairies; he opened them on the world in which these people lived—Luke Havergal, Miniver Cheevy—perplexed with the problems that perplex us. He thus enlarged the world in which we feel ourselves to be living.

Bryson: There's a paradox here, though. His only really successful poem, as far as I know—in the sense that some publisher was glad it was on his list and he sold a lot of copies—was *Tristram*, which was almost an imitation of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. Was that just an aberration on his part? Was he still Robinson when he went off into Lyonesse from Maine?

Cohen: Yes, he was still Robinson in the sense that his preoccupation with human problems was the same, his curiosity about relations between men and women was the same.

Bryson: Did he do anything new with the ancient Arthurian

stories, or do we just write them off as uncharacteristic of Robinson and forget about it?

Cohen: The novelty, of course, is Robinson. He added Robinson and that's what made them new.

Bryson: What do you mean when you say he added Robinson?

Cohen: Well, he didn't treat them as Tennyson did, nor as Matthew Arnold, but he took these people who happened to be living in Camelot long ago and looked at them as though they were living today.

Bryson: As though Guinevere had lived in Gardiner, Maine?

Cohen: Yes.

Lindley: They're really psychological studies, aren't they—much more than Tennyson's characters. Robinson wanted to dive under the surface. And I find in re-reading *Tristram* that what interests me is the group of peripheral characters—not Tristram and Isolt of Ireland, but Isolt of Brittany and her father, King Howel, and even King Mark, at the end sitting there almost like the old men on the walls of Troy, accepting this as a kind of fatality that has occurred—whereas the wonderful idyll of the Joyous Gard seems to me far less successful than I thought it was when I first read it.

Cohen: I must confess that I don't find quite so much in *Tristram* or in the other Arthurian poems as you seem to. To me they seem the least considerable part of Robinson's work; they more than any of his other poems are likely to become tiresome through his mannerisms, through the single color that he infuses all of his poetry with. Robinson in a way lacked electricity in his own personality and life, and I think there's some reflection of that in his poems. There's also some lack of that which electricity sometimes engenders: warmth and color.

Bryson: But when you take a poem like *The Glory of the Nightingales*, where he's dealing with melodramatic material brought down to our own time, is there no electricity?

Cohen: Certainly I should not want any denigrative remark to apply to that poem, because I admire it greatly. It seems to me that if the first collected edition of Robinson's poems, which came out in 1921, had remained the last collected edition, it would include all his considerable and significant work except *The Glory of the Nightingales*. There he rises to a maturity and a profundity which earlier poems suggest, but don't lay out at such great length. It's a poem entirely about forgiveness. Forgiveness is the mature quality in a man.

Bryson: And who would suppose, reading a list of poems by a new author, that one called *The Glory of the Nightingales* would be a melodramatic short story—and that the nightingales were not birds and the glory was not flight, but spiritual forgiveness?

Lindley: Actually, the structure of the poem is very characteristic of Robinson. It is very dramatic, and yet the emphasis is not on the drama but on the moral questions involved. You have at the opening of the poem a man hurrying back to his home town to commit a murder and follow it up with suicide; and then you have the events that result in a quite different conclusion to the poem. It's a

characteristic Robinson piece of work. But I would disagree with you, Mr. Cohen, when you say that this is the only one of the later poems that one can think very highly of. I'd certainly want to include *Cavender's House*, and perhaps *Roman Batholow* as well. That's a long and difficult poem but a fascinating one to me; and it contains what seems to me one of the clues to Robinson's meaning and striving, a line that he has translated from Aristophanes, a very beautiful line: "Let me be worthy of thy mysteries." I think Robinson himself was primarily interested in the mystery of individual human beings, perhaps the mystery of man in general; I think that he felt it was something he had to work at, and only through interpreting his own experience could he hope to understand experience in general.

Cohen: And isn't that one of the qualities, perhaps the primary quality, which draws those of us who have a feeling for Robinson back to him? Draws us back more strongly as our acquaintance with him grows and as our experience grows? Some of his earlier poems with their wonderful wit, with their point, with their marvelous form—because Robinson, though we haven't mentioned it yet, was a marvelous craftsman—these earlier poems have qualities which attract us as younger people; we see the power and feel the quality of Robinson. But then, as we grow older, we realize that the great poets are not the ones who give answers, that perhaps there are no answers; the great poets are the ones who understand that questions exist, who respect the major questions, who respect the mysteries. We ourselves come to respect the mysteries as we grow older and, naturally, we look to a man in whom we find confirmation of our feeling.

Bryson: It seems to me very remarkable that this man deliberately set out to make great poetry out of his own experience, although that was fairly narrow and meagre; that he should have dared to tackle the mystery of human existence in terms of such predicaments, such human difficulties. There is the man in *The Glory of the Nightingales* who feels that his life no longer has any meaning; the only thing for him to do is to kill the man who has ruined it and then kill himself, but he ends up being talked out of his murder by the man he intended to kill.

Cohen: The murder doesn't take place in *The Glory of the Nightingales* because Robinson realizes that violence is no answer; the answer must always be a coming-to-terms with one's self. There's a double answer in *The Glory of the Nightingales*. Mallory doesn't kill Nightingale, he forgives him. Nightingale does a much harder thing: he forgives Mallory. Why is that much more difficult? Because Nightingale has injured Mallory. It's much harder to forgive the man you have injured than the one who has injured you. The poem itself is the commentary of a man who, I suppose, has thought deeply and at great length on such a text as "Forgive them." Incidentally, Robinson is continually offering us light on Biblical texts; there is probably no other poet whose knowledge of the Bible is so intimately worked into the body of his work.

Lindley: His preoccupation is always a moral one, isn't it? And there is that explicitly religious poem, the sonnet about the Cruci-

fixion that he did earlier. You were asking how he could tackle these extremes of human experience with such apparently limited experience himself. I think one of the situations that fascinated him, the situation of human failure, must have been suggested to him early in his life by the failure of his two elder brothers, of whom he was very fond. Both were failures in fairly spectacular though different ways, and I think that he thought about this all the rest of his life—wondering about the degrees of responsibility that the individual bears, wondering whether, when you look at a man, you can tell whether he's a failure or not. In fact, I think the typical figure that fascinates Robinson is the one described in *The Glory of the Nightingales*—Mallory himself, a gentleman gone down and going still. That situation always attracted his interest and curiosity.

Bryson: I wasn't undertaking to say (I want to free myself here of critical guilt) that one can explain a poet by his biography. I suppose what we have here is only the ultimate mystery of any great creative mind: can you find in the raw material of his life the things out of which he made literature? I don't suppose you ever can, but it's a question of whether a man who sets out to be a poet—which is the problem Mr. Cohen raised in the beginning—does well to set out to be *just* a poet. Perhaps he ought to set out to be something else; if he's to be a poet, he'll be one anyhow.

Cohen: Perhaps it's a rash thing to do, but in Robinson's case it worked out and maybe he built better than he knew—because he was able to transmute his experience and to extract from it more than perhaps another man might have. I think you're right to suggest that touching the fringes of failure played a part in it, and certainly he touched more than the fringes. At times he would seem to have been in the very center of the whirlpool of failure, but it gave Robinson an interest in other characters who also escaped worldly success. He was preoccupied with the question: is the success that people grant the real success, or may not personality itself be a success? You see, he knew himself. He knew even at the time when his early books were not being read. Had Roosevelt never praised him, had no one ever read him, had the Literary Guild never chosen *Tristram* in 1927, he would still have been a great poet. He knew that he was a great poet. He realized then that the same experience might be working in the minds of other men. Robinson is always drawing us all into a common circle. That's one of his great powers as a poet, I think. He makes us realize that we share with other people the mysteries that we like to think are unique and peculiar to us; they are resident in the lives of the other people, too.

Lindley: And don't you think that's one of the reasons why we are always being reminded of Robinson's characters in our everyday experiences? We are continually running into someone who reminds us of Miniver Cheevy or Bewick Finzer. Do you remember the wonderful opening lines of *Bewick Finzer*?

*Time was when his half million drew
The breath of six per cent;
But soon the worm of what-was-not
Fed hard on his content . . .*

Cohen: You know, one criticism that's frequently leveled against Robinson is that he's hard to understand, and it's undoubtedly true. We don't know precisely why a woman in the home does this, why a man does that. Oftentimes we don't know precisely what a phrase in Robinson means. Well, there are a number of answers for that. One is that, as Robinson himself said, real poetry says what cannot be said: there's always something incommunicable; we have a sense of meaning for which we do not have any text. In addition, Robinson had—more than Browning, whom he resembles somewhat, more than Tennyson—the secret of creating characters just as life creates them. With the people whom we meet in life, we have a sense of their reality as much from what we do not know about them as from what we do.

Bryson: We know there's something there *not* to know.

Lindley: I think he had a very strong feeling that the essential mystery was incommunicable, but that was no reason for not keeping at work, for not trying to get as close to it as one could. In his poetry I have the sense of something almost like an underground river—muted, a little bitter to the taste, but working deeper into the rock all the time.

Cohen: Yes! And coming closer to it doesn't mean that one comes literally closer to expressing it. It means coming closer to the words that suggest the aura. He himself uses the word "aura" as that which exists around an element which is incommunicable. It's true, what you say, Mr. Lindley; I've often had that feeling myself. Robinson does give one such a sense of mastery! He picks up life in both hands, as it were, and lets it slip through the lines of his poems; we have so strong a feeling of it—a feeling that scarcely any other American poet has given us.

Bryson: In one sense, isn't it surprising that we call him an American poet? Because here was a man who struggled with the incommunicable, in a culture which likes to be very explicit; who was obsessed with failure, in a country where success, we are sometimes told, is made too much of. Nevertheless, he seems somehow to have grasped the essentials not only of humanity but of American humanity, and has said things that we are very proud to have had him say.

HARRY LEON WILSON

The "Red Gap" Stories

(As broadcast November 20, 1955)

HUGH MCNAIR KAHLER • JOHN SELBY • LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: In a series of reappraisals one always comes across authors—I would say great authors, sticking my neck out generously

—that are for some strange reason neglected. In my opinion, Harry Leon Wilson is perhaps less understood and less appreciated now than almost any author we've had in the last forty years. Is there any way of explaining that? I don't mean my opinion, I mean the fact that he's neglected.

Selby: It seems to me that the awful word "culture" is largely to blame. I think it's a continuing factor of our Puritan heritage as much as anything else; it's just not right to be funny, somehow.

Bryson: But how do you explain the fact that Mark Twain, to whom Wilson is very closely related, is treated with so much deference by people who like Culture with a capital C?

Selby: I don't think all of them do, to be really honest. But I think it's possible that it's because he's a little more remote.

Kahler: That would be my guess. Mark Twain was already in the tradition when Wilson began to write. I believe that eventually the critics will discover that it is quite respectable to laugh at such a book as *Ruggles of Red Gap*.

Bryson: What about the fact that Harry Leon Wilson was immensely successful, commercially, during his lifetime? Doesn't that give him a black eye with the critics?

Kahler: That is a common idea, particularly on the part of authors who are not popular with the critics; there may be something in it and again there may not be. But it's true that enormous popularity, particularly in mass-circulation magazines, does you no good at all with people who think that you should write for the few, or preferably for the none; Wilson conspicuously wrote for the many, many, many.

Bryson: I suppose practically everything Wilson wrote was printed in the *Saturday Evening Post*.

Kahler: Nearly everything, to the best of my knowledge. He had some earlier books that were not. But from *Bunker Bean* on I think everything he wrote appeared in the *Post*, and that's a cardinal sin with some critics.

Selby: I'm sure you must have heard somebody condemning somebody else by saying, "Oh, well, he should have been in the slicks."

Kahler: "Slicks" is a word that isn't allowed anywhere in my hearing without a challenge.

Selby: I'm not judging.

Kahler: I know. But others do, and I resent that classification more than any other. Of course, I work for a mass-circulation magazine, and I suppose I'm defending myself here.

Bryson: Wilson wrote other things besides his western stories, but it's the latter that the critics are going to come back to some day, if we all are willing to prophesy that they will. I would like to know just what it was in these western stories that gave him so peculiar a place even in his own lifetime, even in his heyday of success; he shouldn't be written off as a just a writer about cowboys, he was something different. Is this because he made people laugh?

Selby: I'm sure it must be because of that. He was infallible.

Kahler: If you've seen *Ruggles of Red Gap* in the movies, you know that it's impossible not to laugh; and it wasn't possible for

any of us in the days when *Bunker Bean* was running in the *Post* to keep the tears from running down our faces.

Bryson: And yet, you know, there are some passages in *Bunker Bean* that make the tears start for quite other reasons.

Kahler: Yes, Grandma and Grandpa and the little boy, in that visit, which really doesn't belong in *Bunker Bean*. I think that if Wilson were writing it again, he'd probably cut it out. But it's still a lovely chapter.

Bryson: The man did have a sentimental streak in him. But I want to know why people don't want to laugh today?

Selby: Most critics will not take seriously something that's written for pure entertainment.

Bryson: All right, what is this entertainment? I reread some of the Red Gap stories about Ma Pettingill and all that wonderful bunch of characters out there at Arrowhead, and I reread *Bunker Bean*, which is still the most wonderful satire on big business. I want to know why one reads them with absolutely unflinching delight. Why are they funny? Is it possible to find out why a man is funny, or even useful?

Selby: I don't think I can tell you, except that I like to read for entertainment. I picked up these books, I read them, and I laughed. He can make you do that.

Bryson: You knew him well, didn't you, Mr. Kahler?

Kahler: Yes, quite well and quite happily for many years. He was—I hate to use the word—but he was the original deadpan, and that has a certain humor of its own.

Bryson: You mean as a person or in his writing?

Kahler: Both. He was the kind of humorist who didn't mug and didn't grimace at his audience, and that's a long start toward being a good humorist, I think.

Selby: Your mention of deadpans made me think of *Merton of the Movies*. Mert was a great success as a comedian.

Kahler: He knew what made Merton funny, all right; it was his own recipe that he gave to Merton—very close to tears, but no mugging.

Bryson: *Bunker Bean*, the young man who makes a surprising Cinderella climb in the financial world, is deadpan, too. And Ma Pettingill, who is Harry Wilson's spokeswoman for so much of his best stuff, has a kind of deadpan humor. It's related to Mark Twain; it seems to come out of Mark Twain, but Wilson gives it a special twist.

Selby: He has his own type of understated exaggeration, if you will let me make that contradiction in terms. He says, for instance, about Ma Pettingill: "That woman would fight a rattlesnake and give it the first two bites."

Bryson: I suppose that Ruggles and Ma Pettingill are as typical of Wilson's humor as anything.

Kahler: Wilson is there in both of them, yes.

Bryson: He's all there. Ruggles is the English "gentleman's gentleman" who is won in a poker game in Paris, and is taken out to Red Gap across a prairie. I remember the scene in the movie, that

wonderful movie—the miles and miles and miles of perfectly empty prairie, and Ruggles looking out of the train, wondering where in the world he's going. Then, of course, when he gets there—and this is in the tradition—there's a slip, and instead of being recognized as a valet, everybody thinks he's the English nobleman himself.

Selby: I don't suppose you can make a formula for it, but I would include deadpan exaggeration, a great understanding and love of the human race, and finally an artistry in words.

Bryson: The words are very important here. Ma Pettingill, the hard-riding, hard-bitten old ranch owner, is a wonderful person; she's one of the most vivid characters in American literature. But one of the reasons why you love her is because she had a tongue that just snapped like a whip. You remember the story about Red Gap going Bohemian, when a gal named Verna Bell came out from New York and taught them how to sit around and smoke cigarettes and drink bad liquor (this was during Prohibition). They knew it was a Bohemian place because there were six Chianti bottles tied to a string and hanging on the wall. Then one of the ladies in the town decided that Verna Bell was getting away with murder and she'd fix her, so she sent for a society girl from New York named Dulcie. Ma Pettingill didn't think Verna Bell was in any danger from Dulcie, because all Dulcie was interested in was eating. You remember that line when Dulcie is first introduced and stoops to pick up some tidbit that had fallen to the floor: "Dulcie didn't fold good."

Selby: Well, that's typical of the man. Don't you think there's also something in *position*? I don't know whether I can say exactly what I mean, but he'd take somebody who in one place is perfectly all right, slightly caricatured perhaps but perfectly all right, and move him maybe a thousand miles, maybe only six inches off; then everything is wrong and everything is, therefore, funny.

Bryson: You're saying that the man has a certain talent for social comedy, for comedy of manners. He's showing that what is good in one place is not good in another, which is a typical trick of social comedy.

Selby: Perhaps it's instinctive, but nevertheless it is true. There are some very good examples of that in other writers. I can think of Mary Roberts Rinehart and the Tish stories.

Kahler: Same thing.

Selby: As long as the girls stay at home, you know, they're perfectly fine, but the moment they move . . .

Bryson: And think what he did with Ruggles! Here is this English valet who is transported out west, goes through all these vicissitudes, and is toppled from his false eminence because he really isn't an English nobleman, he's just a servant. If you remember his studies of the Declaration of Independence or, in the movie, that final scene where Ruggles reads the Gettysburg Address . . .

Kahler: Of course, we had Charles Laughton to help us on that.

Bryson: That's right. But Harry Leon Wilson invented the idea, and—this is one reason, I think, why I love this story—he gave you there a feeling of what democracy can do to a man who, in the beginning, is completely overlaid with the character of a servant.

Kahler: At the beginning he's the most poisonous snob you ever read about.

Selby: He's a *gentleman's* gentleman.

Bryson: He's a valet and absolutely snobbish. But at the end he reads one of the great documents of American history, he's an American, and he's a man.

Selby: It's wonderful!

Bryson: It's funny, but it's also very touching. There he moves into another field, because it seems to me that in the literature of the great west—which is American, isn't it? There's nothing else like it . . .

Kahler: The west was an American invention.

Bryson: And its literature developed two main streams. One is the great folk hero, the cowboy. How would you define a western story, Mr. Kahler?

Kahler: Well, Mr. Blackwell of Street & Smith, who used to edit a magazine called *Western Stories*, once described it as "A story in which persons named Bud or Chuck do things with branding irons or shooting irons to people of metropolitan or Mexican origin, thereby winning the affection of divided-skirt daughters of the rancho, home on vacation from expensive eastern boarding schools."

Selby: That's perfect.

Bryson: And millions of words of that kind have been written and sold in America to mass-circulation magazines. But out of all that has come—and I think this is a fairly common thing in the history of the world's literature—certain elements of greatness; you have a folk hero emerging. I suppose *High Noon*, the recent movie, would come as close to epitomizing it as anything. And then there's this other stream, of which Mark Twain was the great originator and Harry Leon Wilson is the great carrier-on, in which it is all made just a bit funny, just a bit humorous, but warm and comfortable and endearing at the same time.

Kahler: Both of them loved the people they were writing about. That's probably the thing they had in common.

Bryson: And Wilson is never really making fun of the Chinese cook or the long-legged cowboy or Ma Pettingill with her homemade cigarettes.

Kahler: Oh, he clearly adores Ma Pettingill. For instance Ruggles says that she had been spending the afternoon "watching her calves being embroidered with her monogram, a piece of sentimentality of which I would not have deemed her capable." You see that Wilson adores the woman.

Bryson: Yes. But under that there's a very curious brutality, which is part of the west, too.

Kahler: You mean that she *watched* her calves being branded?

Bryson: With a hot iron.

Selby: Well, it's not brutality, really.

Bryson: It's brutality in the eyes of these people who spell Culture with a big C. It's rough.

Selby: In that sense, yes.

Bryson: This is a kind of slapdash and wonderful world in

which people can be warm and happy and at the same time perform these feats of verbal fencing and other types of magic. Well, outside of Ma Pettingill, Ruggles, Merton, and Bunker Bean, there's a whole string of wonderful characters.

Selby: Oh, there are dozens of them. We were talking, weren't we, about Cousin Jane? I think she was in his last book. And what was it that Henry Seidel Canby said?

Bryson: He said that he couldn't imagine anybody but Thackeray capable of writing the first part of that book. He thought the book as a whole—and it's true—didn't quite hold up. But that gives you some sense of the range of this man.

Selby: Well, even in the critical big league the man did occasionally figure prominently and successfully, and I imagine that he will again.

Bryson: But you see how difficult it is to convey, in talking about a humorist, why it is that you love him.

Kahler: I loved him as a person, and I suppose I would have liked his books even if they weren't as good as they are.

Bryson: Well, I never saw the man. But years ago, when I was an undergraduate, I began to read these stories in the *Saturday Evening Post*. I have reread them and I think they stand up, because they have what I suppose every great critic has said is the final preservative of a book: they have style.

Selby: That's true; the man could write!

Kahler: You could read *Ruggles of Red Gap* aloud over this microphone for hours, and it would make much better listening than our conversation.

Bryson: Of course it would—but why does one talk about books? You talk about books because you hope that you can, in some way, infect another person with your own feeling about them, don't you?

Kahler: I would consider myself a great benefactor of the human race if I could persuade other people to extract some of the pleasure out of Harry Wilson that I have had and still have. I think that's really the terrible pity about all this, that here is a great source of pleasure—not just laughter, but pleasure below it and above it—that has been lost.

Bryson: We come back to Mr. Selby's point again—that we are in a time when people don't want to be happy, when they don't want to get pleasure out of reading. Do you really think that, Mr. Selby?

Selby: All I can look at is the evidence. I don't think there's anything or anybody today that's even vaguely comparable with Harry Leon Wilson.

Bryson: We do have humorists, though. We had Benchley up to quite recently, and Benchley was a good humorist.

Selby: We laughed at him; and if we had him now, we would still be laughing.

Bryson: We had Ring Lardner, we laughed at Lardner.

Kahler: And Thurber, for instance.

Bryson: Well, Thurber is not just a funny man. Of course, neither was Harry Leon Wilson . . .

Selby: Exactly the point!

Bryson: But Thurber seems always to have a more serious purpose than mere entertainment. What was Wilson's purpose in writing these books?

Kahler: I know why he wrote them—because he liked to write 'em. That was his pleasure, it was his life.

Bryson: But you say he never laughed, himself?

Kahler: I never saw him laugh, but he must have been convulsed with laughter inside.

Bryson: Behind that stone face.

Kahler: He was a sentimentalist and a comedian. He edited *Puck* when I first knew him, and *Puck* was a really funny weekly paper. He was always involved in humorous situations and conversation, but without any mugging, without any laughing.

Bryson: You mean that he could make a situation humorous without smiling?

Kahler: Just by sitting there.

Selby: Life was funny to him. No doubt about it.

Bryson: It was funny, and yet it wasn't funny in the sense that the great satirists find life funny. He didn't despise people.

Kahler: He was never bitter.

Selby: There's no malice in him, ever.

Bryson: Maybe that's why he doesn't hold up?

Selby: You mean that we're more malicious today than people were a generation ago?

Bryson: I think malice is one of the things that keep books alive, Mr. Selby.

Selby: Perhaps people think the world is in such a dreadful state that it's wrong, somehow, not to look at it and cry. I don't believe that.

Kahler: Well, it's pretty hard to get away from the headlines. And that, I think, is one of the explanations why there's so little good fiction being written—people can't bring themselves to think about this world and they won't write about it.

Bryson: I think I would agree with Mr. Selby, then, that that's exactly the kind of a world into which a writer like Wilson ought to be reintroduced.

Kahler: If we only could! And that's why I would consider myself a terrific benefactor if anything we say or do would help to share this pleasure with others.

Bryson: You can't really say very much about him. You can't quote him, because he isn't a jokester, although you can quote these wonderful single lines, as you've done. But mostly what you have to do is just to say to people, in a kind of fatherly and gentle way, "Now here is a man who is just full of delight, full of humor, full of pleasure, and full of meaning, too, if you'll just give him a chance."

SINCLAIR LEWIS

Main Street

(As broadcast November 27, 1955)

NORMAN COUSINS

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PERRY MILLER

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LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: Reappraisals seem to me most interesting when they are an attempt to get at the real character of someone who swept all opinion before him a generation ago, and who now isn't talked about very much, but who probably in a somewhat less flamboyant way is regaining a new reputation—maybe an even greater one.

Cousins: One hopes.

Miller: I think he is. Of course, it is a phenomenon to look back on 1920 and realize what a tremendously unexpected success it had.

Bryson: But was it all a shock success?

Miller: At first it was in great part a shock success; I think that's perfectly true. In America it was assumed that cities might be evil but that American virtue resided in small towns. And when Sinclair Lewis, in 1920, lay what seemed profane hands upon this ark of the American covenant, everybody was shocked. Amazingly, though, they all rushed out to buy it and to revel in it.

Cousins: At that time there *was* a great deal of shock value in *Main Street*, but as the years passed people began to realize that Lewis was probably right. There was a reappraisal of the book and, largely on the basis of it, Sinclair Lewis emerged as one of the great American writers. It was about that time that he received the Nobel prize.

Miller: In 1930.

Cousins: Yes. And all during the thirties his stature continued to grow, despite the fact that the books which he wrote in those years were not as good as the early ones. Today, it seems to me, we can make another reappraisal of Sinclair Lewis and realize that he was not, perhaps, so bad as we once thought he was. This book has a dimension which was perhaps not sufficiently recognized at the time.

Bryson: What do you mean by saying that after a while people decided that he was right? Right about what? Because it seems to me that when I first read this book thirty-five years ago I thought Carol Kennicott, the heroine, was just funny. Well, I read it again about a month ago, and I fell in love with her; I was very unhappy about her fate. This is a wonderful woman he depicted here.

Cousins: I agree with you, but when the book was first published the center of excitement was not so much Carol Kennicott as it was what Lewis had to say about Main Street. When we reread the book today, I believe we see that the story is principally that of Carol Kennicott.

Miller: You know, Lewis himself once said, when somebody

told him the book was a bad book because Carol wasn't as good stuff as her husband, that he exulted in it—because, as he said, "I had most painstakingly planned that she shouldn't be, that she should be just bright enough to sniff a little but not bright enough to do anything about it."

Bryson: There, of course, Sinclair Lewis is indulging in one of those smart cracks that always did him such disservice. Because it isn't true—she is much better than that.

Miller: Part of his peculiar psychology was always to underrate himself in public and then to get angry when people took him at his own word; that was always a problem with him. Lewis might have believed this when he said it, but actually the artist in him—the novelist, the creator of living characters—built better than he knew.

Cousins: I agree. The satirical aspects of Lewis's work, especially in *Main Street*, which shocked so many people at the time, seem today less important than what he was really trying to say. As everybody knows, this novel is the story of a young girl who fell in love with a Minnesota doctor some eleven or twelve years older than she . . .

Bryson: Rather because Sir Galahad hadn't come along.

Cousins: Precisely.

Bryson: She really loved him, but she wasn't swept off her feet.

Miller: No, that's one curious thing about the story.

Cousins: Anyway, she was a girl who had to cope with what she conceived to be the incredible mediocrity of life on the plains, and yet she made her adjustment to it. As I say, at that particular time America was shocked by what Mr. Miller properly calls the attack on the ark. But when we reread this book today, we're not very shocked by what he says about Main Street. That is unimportant; Main Street has changed. It seems to me that what lives in this book, and what makes it even more timely today than when it was published, is the fact that he has defined the predicament of the bored married woman in our society.

Miller: Yes, I think that's true. But in reading it again did you notice, once he gets Carol Kennicott married and she starts her married life, how the rhythm of the seasons is woven into it? The first year is spelled out: Autumn, Winter, Spring, Summer; but then the seasons go faster and faster until at last we're moving through the years on the prairie at an exhilarating rate. Now whether that was a conscious principle of organization in Sinclair Lewis's mind one might doubt, but it's there, and it makes this book something more than a sociological document about the small town in 1920.

Cousins: I think he handles it very artistically. There is first of all his ability to compress the important events of a person's life in an episodic treatment. And then you have the sweeping phrase, which forms a beautiful bridge to something that happens some years later. As, for example, when he speaks about the adjustment that Carol Kennicott made in her life . . .

Bryson: "Adjustment" is a word that I'm going to pick you up on in a moment, but go ahead.

Cousins: When she adjusts, for example, to the fact that she

is married to Dr. Kennicott and that he has certain values. Carol Kennicott, like Sinclair Lewis himself, seems to be vibrating between optimism and pessimism. In his Nobel prize acceptance speech, Lewis indicated that the qualities he attached to Carol Kennicott are qualities that were important to him as a novelist—because, he said, it was his fate to swing constantly from optimism to pessimism and back. But so is it the fate of anyone who writes or speaks of anything in America, the most contradictory, the most depressing, the most stirring of any land in the world today. This is what Carol Kennicott discovered about Gopher Prairie.

Bryson: Because she, too, was an artist.

Cousins: Back of that is something that Carol says many times in *Main Street*, in one form or another, which I think is central to Sinclair Lewis's conception of the writer in America at the time he wrote this book. Carol keeps saying "It's all the same revolt; there's a ferment going on all over the world." She's always asked "Well, what is it? What does it amount to?" And she says "I think, perhaps, we want a more conscious life." The problem that was really pressing Sinclair Lewis when he wrote *Main Street* was to get enough of the documentation in—the Chautauqua, the local play, the newspaper, the drug store, the shabby backs of the stores, all the paraphernalia of Main Street—but he wanted to get it *conscious*. And Carol is a better character than he says he intended her to be, because she is a vehicle of consciousness. I think this gives the book its unity.

Bryson: It has unity in spite of the string of episodes of which the plot seems to be made up. But there are two points here that I wish you'd illuminate for me. What is this sense of time? I've heard it said about one of the very greatest of the world's novelists that his greatness was shown in the fact that he gave you a sense of the passage of time. It was said of Tolstoy.

Miller: Yes.

Bryson: Any novelist who can give you a sense of time's passage—you don't have to be as philosophic about it as Proust was—but anybody who can give you that sense has the makings of greatness as a storyteller. Now, Lewis had that.

Cousins: Yes, he had.

Bryson: Whether he had it consciously or not, he had it. And the other thing is that Lewis seems to me to have been guilty of a fallacy, which is almost a necessary fallacy to a great novelist: he thought that what he was describing in Gopher Prairie was unique. But almost every novelist who's ever written about life in small places has written exactly the same story.

Miller: Later on, I must say, Lewis argued that he was misinterpreted if people thought that he believed Gopher Prairie to be unique.

Bryson: He didn't mean it when he said it?

Miller: He didn't mean it to be unique. It was just that he was completely fascinated by this problem, which was deep, of course, in his own personal experience.

Cousins: In *Main Street* itself he says, toward the end, that

nine-tenths of all American towns are so alike that it is the completest boredom to wander from one to another.

Bryson: But he didn't realize that nine-tenths of the Greek towns in the time of Socrates were also alike, and nine-tenths of the towns in France. The territories are smaller, but the sameness is universal.

Miller: Well, he was accused of that by an article in a leading American magazine which, he said, "informed my ignorance that small towns in Europe are quite as narrow-minded as in America. True," he goes on to say, "I had myself said precisely the same thing in *Main Street* years before, but it is always a comfort to be corrected."

Cousins: He also says that if Dr. Kennicott were snatched from Gopher Prairie and instantly conveyed to a town leagues away, he wouldn't realize it; he would walk down the same Main Street—almost certainly it would be called Main Street, as Lewis says—and in the same drug store he would see the same young man serving the same ice cream soda to the same young woman, with the same magazines and same phonograph records under her arm, and not until he'd climbed to his office and found another sign on the door, another Dr. Kennicott inside, would he understand that something curious had presumably happened. And so Sinclair Lewis is not writing just about the Main Street that he knew so well in Minnesota, but about any Main Street anywhere.

Miller: Of course, that's why the book had this initial success in the 1920s, because I suppose that the greater part of the population either lived in small towns or had small-town backgrounds.

Bryson: They mostly came from there.

Miller: So that it hit them much harder than any such book would do today. It makes you realize how much things have changed.

Cousins: And I think Mr. Bryson's point is quite correct: that if Sinclair Lewis had lived among the Athenians, he probably would have written about Main Street, Athens.

Bryson: Of course he would have. And if he realized it, all the better—because, as I think you have said, the thing that holds this book together, in addition to his sense of time, is his sense of a certain social problem which Mr. Cousins has defined as the bored married woman in our society.

Cousins: The *intelligent* bored married woman.

Miller: Oh. I quite agree. I remember once having a conversation with him—this was shortly before his death—about what had happened to American small towns since he wrote the book. I spoke about the improvement in transportation and heating, radio, television, and all of that, and I stumbled a minute in trying to say something; I said "Well, you did it—you did it." And his face lit up with enthusiasm and he said "Yes, I got it just at the right moment." It was that sense of a dramatic moment in culture that really lay underneath him. There was rage against the mediocrity and monotony of small-town civilization, but there was also a very great fas-

cination with this experiment that he had reported properly and correctly.

Bryson: Is there any sense in saying that the reason why—after *Main Street* and *Arrowsmith* and perhaps one or two more—he became less and less a true novelist is because the scientist and the reporter got the better of him?

Miller: That's certainly one strong element in it; it's something I have meditated on a great deal and I'm not sure that I know the answer. But I would say that the precarious balance between the artist and the documentary reporter fell apart.

Cousins: That's why I'm glad that in rereading *Main Street* I found a different Sinclair Lewis, I found a real novelist. I had feared in recent years that Sinclair Lewis was not so much a novelist as a very adept manipulator of people, who could toy with them, could make them look ridiculous—who *could* make them look strong but preferred to make them look ridiculous.

Miller: Well, some of the characters are really strong, like Sondelius in *Arrowsmith*. He says that's his favorite character.

Cousins: Of course, I'm trying to make a distinction between the two Lewises. The later Lewis left you with a certain feeling of disappointment, and that is why I went back to *Main Street*; it helped to make a basic correction of my own thinking about Lewis. He's a novelist, a real novelist. In *Main Street*, in *Arrowsmith* especially, you find compassion, you find an attempt to place the sovereignty of the human spirit above situations and above brittle circumstance. Reading this book today, I have the feeling that he was able to get at one of the most important American problems. At that time, of course, we didn't have as many well-educated women, proportionately, as we have today.

Miller: Oh, no, Carol was an exception in 1920.

Cousins: I don't think that Carol is so much of an exception now. But I think that the intelligent and well-educated married woman, who is willing to do the housework and take care of the family, but who believes that she has a capacity beyond that, represents an important problem. Lewis defines it very clearly in the book when he says that Carol was a woman with a working brain and no work. There were only three things she could do: have children, start a career of reforming, or be satisfied with the activities of church and study club and bridge parties. But this didn't give her the fulfillment that her education had led her to believe was essential.

Bryson: I'm glad you don't take the opportunity to say that her education must have been at fault.

Cousins: No. I don't think it was, but I think Lewis was sensitive to a problem which had not yet become epidemic in American life.

Miller: There is an eloquent passage in the middle of the book where Carol says to her husband: "I think I want you to help me find out what has made this darkness of all the women, grey darkness and shadowy trees. We're all in it. Ten million women, young married women with good prosperous husbands, and business women in linen collars, and grandmothers that gad out to teas, and wives

of underpaid miners, and farm wives who really like to make butter and go to church. What is it we want and what is it we need?"

Cousins: This is the important question today. I can't think of a contemporary American novelist who states the question better.

Miller: I think you're right to some extent; I don't know whether I'd go quite along with you in putting so much emphasis on this aspect of the book, although it was a problem which obviously fascinated Lewis as a student of America. There is the wife in *Dodsworth* as another study of this sort of thing, or the rich woman in *Arrowsmith*. Of course it is there. But I would like to get at something else about Carol, which I think Mr. Bryson may have had it in mind when he said he wanted to come back to this "adjustment" business. I would have a little difficulty myself in feeling that the theme is Carol's adjustment. I think it's Carole's ultimate initiation, which is a matter that takes time. If this book were merely a study of a neurotic, educated, idle woman it would long since have been forgotten.

Cousins: Oh, I agree. I don't think for a minute that Carol was merely a neurotic woman. I do think she faced an honest challenge, a challenge that was extremely difficult for her to meet in her early years; but at the end she triumphs and is completely convincing. She makes the adjustment.

Bryson: But she didn't adjust in the sense that she gave up. Adjustment sometimes means acceptance. Here it's not acceptance. It's a knowledge of where the fight is and what it's about, and a determination to carry it on.

Cousins: But both of them made the adjustment in terms of being able to recognize certain values they had denied earlier.

Bryson: Certainly.

Miller: I still think that's on the surface level of the book. That's why I like to call attention to the fact, which people don't often realize, that Sinclair Lewis came of a New England strain. He's identified with the west and with Minnesota, but the family was New England. A great deal of his mimicking of preachers, of giving revival sermons, was actually a wish to be a kind of Old Testament prophet. There's a prophetic element in this book which we haven't stressed enough.

Bryson: There was in Sinclair Lewis's curious character a good deal of Puritanism, even though he tried to disguise it and made fun of it.

Cousins: Oh, he was a child of that tradition. I agree with Mr. Miller, but I think it ought to be emphasized that Lewis has a very telling passage at the end of the book in which he says that Carol's hatred of Gopher Prairie had run out. She saw it now as a toiling new settlement, saw it with sympathy.

Miller: That's what I mean by the prophetic element.

Cousins: She saw them as a lot of good folk, working hard and trying to bring up their families the best they could.

Miller: Yes, but the prophet must also point out their sins and shortcomings.

Bryson: That's right—always in the hope that they can be

ultimately saved. But this leaves suspended a question which is implied here: a good many people of the 1920s would have said that the way to save them would have been to turn loose more educated women in the villages. Now is there any reason for thinking (and this is a strange moment to ask such a question) that by turning loose *more* educated women in the villages of America we've produced more Carol Kennicotts, with their difficulties and temporary frustrations, or have we solved the problem?

Miller: But Sinclair Lewis' point always was that Carol was redeemable because she was concerned about being conscious, not because she was educated.

Bryson: That's right. But education, I should say as one professor to another, ought to make people conscious.

Cousins: I agree. I don't think the problem in the case of Carol Kennicott was education. I think it was rather the fact that America was growing very fast, and so it was inevitable that someone who was a product of that education would suddenly rebel against what she conceived to be the mediocrity around her. Eventually, she saw certain values even in that. But I don't think she gave up for a minute her belief in the importance of education, or that she would have done anything differently.

Bryson: I think if she had her life to live over again she'd do exactly what she does in this very moving story. As we read it again, we see that it fits today even better than it did the twenties.

GEORGE SANTAYANA

The Life of Reason

(As broadcast December 4, 1955)

CHARLES FRANKEL • BERNARD FRIZZELL • LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: It is true in one way to say that Santayana was not a typical American, although he did most of his great work in this country, he taught in this country, he was concerned with the problems of this country; and yet I think that in a very real way he *was* a typical American philosopher, strange as that may seem when one considers his European style.

Frankel: I think he was in many ways a typical philosopher of the United States. It's extraordinary: while he himself wanted to disown his American background, the English don't read him much, the French don't read him much, and neither do the Spanish. It's we Americans who read him and say that in some way he's one of our own.

Bryson: Can you isolate the philosophic essence of his Americanism? Can it be done?

Frankel: I can state the essence of Santayana in a word, as he might have done, or in a few words. The essence, however, is not as rich as the content. What Santayana tried to do in *The Life of Reason* was to spell out a central theme. The theme was from Aristotle. Santayana believed that everything ideal has a natural basis and that everything natural has an ideal fruition.

Frizell: I would say that that's just about the essence of *The Life of Reason*, but there is another aspect to it. And that, of course, is his definition of what the "life of reason" is. I think perhaps the way to approach it is through one of his very best epigrams, the one about fanaticism, in which he said: "Fanaticism consists in redoubling your efforts when you've forgotten your aims."

Bryson: That's *not* the "life of reason."

Frizell: No! It's exactly the reverse. And when he finally got to the "life of reason," he said that it was the unity given to all of existence by a mind in love with the good.

Bryson: I suppose no modern philosopher was a better writer than Santayana. Some people think he's almost too rich a writer to be a good thinker. At the same time, there was behind this elegant style something very simple and very natural: he himself was always saying that the essence of his philosophy was common sense.

Frankel: Well, it *is* common sense, although I think it's a very extraordinary man who has that kind of common sense.

Bryson: But that was in the title of the first of the five volumes of *The Age of Reason*.

Frankel: *Reason in Common Sense*, yes. I think Santayana was trying to do something that in many ways is difficult to do, even rather radical. Most people are inclined to depreciate ideals when they frequently have lowly origins. We are all familiar, for example, with popular Freudianism which says "Oh, you only say that because . . ."

Bryson: It's the "only" that does the damage.

Frankel: Yes, it's the "nothing but." What Santayana wanted to show was that all our deepest ideals—our religion, our art, our science, our politics—are deeply rooted in our biology, in the necessities of our social existence. But, at the same time, what's important about them is the perfection they embody—the image of some ideal, some perfectly good thing, towards which we are reaching. He could look at what man was aspiring to with a kind of dispassionate love that I don't find in any other modern philosopher.

Bryson: People forget that warning of Aristotle: you should never judge a thing by the discovery of its origin.

Frizell: Isn't it true that Santayana called his book *The Life of Reason*, and the first volume *Reason in Common Sense*, at least partly because at the time he was writing it . . .

Bryson: Fifty years ago.

Frizell: He was at that time fighting against a completely different ideal, namely, that of idealism.

Frankel: Santayana starts with the idealist view of what a philosopher ought to do: he ought to look at all time, all human life, try to see it in some steady and circumspect way, and try to appraise

human ideals. But what Santayana wanted to do was to turn idealism on its head, or rather . . .

Bryson: On its feet!

Frankel: Back on its feet, yes.

Frizell: Of course, he did call himself a materialist and at various times a naturalist, too. At the time he was writing this book, half a century ago, naturalism and materialism were not considered common sense. They were considered rather outrageous. It strikes me that one of the reasons why he calls his philosophy common sense is because this was the way things were; this was the way people should look at them. What he was saying in his very elegant, civilized style was what struck him as being the most obvious of all things—namely, common sense.

Frankel: Philosophers always have a way, no matter what views they hold, of claiming that they speak for common sense. But I think I would say myself that Santayana came closer to it than most philosophers have done. He was eminently sane and at the same time disengaged and compassionate. That's the combination of qualities that's so singular in Santayana.

Bryson: Before we get to that paradox, let's settle the one we've got. How can a man say that he's talking from the standpoint of a common-sense philosophy and still be as rich and in some ways as difficult as Santayana is? After all, he addressed himself not to the technical philosophers but to the general public. And, although he's always had his passionate admirers, he's never—except in the one novel he wrote, which wasn't a very good one—had a very large public.

Frizell: No, he hasn't. But if Santayana wasn't aiming at the technicians, the professors of philosophy teaching in the universities, neither was he aiming at a vast public, the kind of public that would read a very popular magazine. What he was after, I believe—and it seems to come right out of his works—was a public that was intelligent and interested in the moral problems of the day. Essentially, I believe that he was less a philosopher in the technical sense (that is a metaphysician or an epistemologist) than he was a moral philosopher.

Bryson: But what did he want to do for them, if he was a moralist? Moralists have practical purposes when they address their audience.

Frizell: I think that Santayana would have smiled rather sadly and rather skeptically if he had heard us talking about him in these terms, because he had a kind of abhorrence of moralists. He thought the Platonists, for example, really weren't in love with nature or with people, but wanted to force people and things to be what the Platonists thought they ought to be. This was a basic distinction in Santayana's view. He was a man who claimed that what he loved, in effect, was nature and people; that what he wanted to teach was an appreciation of the variety of the ideals that would come out of the various harmonies of nature; that these things were transient, were evanescent, but that they had an infinite variety. He was very pleased to be in a world that he saw in this light, even though most

of his friends, who took a more absolutist position, thought that it was dreadful to be in a situation where there wasn't one sole good and one sole conception of beauty. In this sense, he was a moralist—and in this sense, too, I think he had a certain compassion and a certain charity.

Frankel: I think that explains his paradoxical reputation. It's the reason why, although he's much admired, he has never really had any followers. I say this more to praise Santayana than to condemn, but he was a moralist without a cause—and you can't become the disciple of someone who isn't really preaching a cause.

Frizell: Every time he talks about religions, for example, he says that they may become discredited but that they never die until they're replaced. He wasn't the man to replace a religion, although he was one, perhaps, to discredit a certain type of truth that has often been ascribed to religion.

Bryson: I don't think he wanted to discredit anything that he thought any human being could possibly find of value, did he? It was this variety of human response to the variety of nature that he had a compassionate feeling for. But his almost purely esthetic attitude toward the world seems to me to be pretty far from what most people mean by "common sense." He seems to be saying, "Well, I agree with you, young man-in-the-street; I feel for you; I have a great deal of sympathy for the passions that drive you back and forth, and for these varieties of values that you respond to. That's all wonderful, life is a wonderful spectacle, but you take it seriously—and I don't."

Frizell: He certainly did not mean by common sense what most people mean, in the sense of being mundane or common.

Bryson: Or practical?

Frizell: Or even practical, because the practicality of his thought was on a different level. It was not the practicality of mundane matters, it was the practicality of a civilized man who was searching for the essence of what made life worth living—namely, values.

Frankel: I think he believed it to be the kind of common sense that you find, for example, in the great religions—a sense of the vanity of all things, but, nevertheless, the importance of all things. He had in mind the moral values and the traditions of the great civilizations. He uses somewhere the phrase "ancient human orthodoxies," and I think perhaps it's less misleading than "common sense."

Bryson: But *orthodoxies*, in the plural?

Frankel: Oh, it's plural!

Bryson: Never one single orthodoxy?

Frankel: Never.

Bryson: And yet, after this one on common sense, I would say that of the five volumes—or chapters, in the new one-volume edition—the one on religion is the greatest thing in the book.

Frankel: I would hesitate to pick out any one as the greatest . . .

Bryson: The one that does *me* the most good.

Frankel: Well, I don't really disagree. There are so many good things in the book, but the section on religion, with its general theme that religion is literally false but poetically true, is an unparalleled

tour de force. I find the phrase "poetically true" somehow misleading or confusing, but I think I know what he meant.

Frizell: I think he states at one point, doesn't he, that religion is a myth? He takes it just as he takes the Greek or other pagan myths—as a thing made up in part of superstition, in part of moral truth; but what you get out of it is something of extreme value in the sense that you get a kind of moral sanction of things and events. And in this sense he sees religion as part of the ideal society.

Frankel: Religion, as he says, gives you another world to live in. It populates the universe with dramatic figures who embody the ideals that men normally and naturally and quite rationally seek.

Bryson: It dramatizes your moral values.

Frankel: If you take the drama as the real thing, you're superstitious—but if you take the drama for what it signifies, then you're wise.

Bryson: And if you fail to see the dramatic value of it, he would say, you're insensitive.

Frizell: He would say that. And the interesting thing is that here you have a man who in any usual sense of the word does not believe in religion, and yet who speaks for it as very few religious people ever have.

Bryson: I know a number of profoundly religious people—people who have a literal faith in certain doctrines or tenets or revelations—who find Santayana an extremely interesting writer on religion, because his irony doesn't disturb them. It does disturb many people, though, doesn't it? Is his detachment one reason why he doesn't have a very large audience?

Frankel: Well, there are a great many reasons.

Bryson: But people want an author to commit himself to something.

Frankel: Yes, he's uncommitted. And at times—it's not so clear in *The Life of Reason* as in some of his later books—one does have the feeling that he's striking a pose; he's being the wise man. That must be said. In *The Life of Reason* I think he's genuine all the way through. But a philosopher has to have disciples. Santayana has admirers but no real disciples—and, of course, no good imitators. You can't imitate what Santayana did because he was unique and he had wisdom. You don't imitate wisdom, you can't copy it; you either have it or not. He was a spectator. He was as uncommitted as he possibly could be; he actually recognized his lack of commitment; he was delighted to sit by, to watch, to profit from what he saw, and to write about it with as much beauty, probably, as any philosopher ever has done. It would say that he is certainly one of the finest stylists among all the philosophers who ever wrote.

Frizell: It's an extraordinary prose.

Bryson: It's the richest, the most poetic philosophic prose in English. It's closer to the best of Plato than anything that has ever been done in English or, I should think, in any other language. But to go back to one of your paradoxes, Mr. Frankel: how can a man have detachment and at the same time give you so deep a conviction of his compassion? He really did feel for the human predicament.

Frankel: The best answer I can give is an example. Let me read something to you. He's writing about love, very early in *Reason in Common Sense* . . .

Bryson: And here he means love between men and women?

Frankel: He means love between men and women. He says:

In the passion of love, for instance, a cause unknown to the sufferer, but which is doubtless the springflood of hereditary instincts accidentally let loose, suddenly checks the young man's gaiety, dispels his random curiosity, arrests perhaps his very breath; and when he looks for a cause to explain his suspended faculties, he can find it only in the presence or image of another being, of whose character possibly he knows nothing and whose beauty may not be remarkable; yet that image pursues him everywhere, and he is dominated by an unaccustomed tragic earnestness and a new capacity for suffering and joy. If the passion be strong there is no previous interest or duty that will be remembered before it; if it be lasting the whole life may be reorganized by it; it may impose new habits, other manners, and another religion. Yet what is the root of all this idealism? An irrational instinct, normally intermittent, such as all dumb creatures share . . ."

Bryson: That's so typical of Santayana. I suppose that if I were young, and at the moment violently in love, I would resent that last sentence. But somehow or other it doesn't have any sting in it.

Frankel: No, it doesn't have any sting; it perfectly illustrates the central theme. Here is love with all its idealism, and yet it's "an irrational instinct such as all dumb creatures share."

Bryson: Even though that's very near the beginning of this book, he has already convinced you that he means it when he says that each natural thing can flower into an ideal.

Frizell: I would like to make one point with respect to his comments about love. He was able to write with considerable perception about such matters, with detachment and irony, but at the same time he was a man who had a basis of feeling that is not often perceptible in the light of reason. There is one place in his autobiography, *Persons and Places*, in which he recounts going back to his native town of Avila, where his father speaks to him about his sister, whom he loved very dearly; his father says, "Poor Susanita! She was such a wonderful girl and she gave such promise of being such a wonderful person. Here she is"—at this time she must have been about forty—"here she is, just another woman like any of the others." Santayana recognized the truth of his father's judgment, but he also recognized that there was no charity in it. And he commented that, for the judgment to have been charitable, one might admit that she had done very little with her life: she had not married, she had no children, she had written no books; but, he said, "the achievement was not the important thing; it was the life and radiance that she had cast in her life, before the inevitable tragedy of death, that really counted." In this incident I seem to see that the ironist is not merely an ironist but also a charitable philosopher.

Frankel: Yes, his heart has been touched in some extraordinary way. He usually referred to his writing about human life as "literary psychology," and was rather deprecatory about it. But actually it's extraordinary literature; there are very few novelists who can write with as much imaginative sympathy about home life, the family, or having children. It's really astonishing. Here's this bachelor who never belonged any place in the world, but who can write from the point of view of people who do belong and who have lived quite ordinary lives.

Frizell: He lived until he was eighty-eight. And in all that time, in all that writing—some thirty-odd books—I think there are only two references to any kind of relationship that he might have had with other women, apart from members of his family. One was at the age of twelve—a little girl with whom he used to dance in Boston, with whom he never exchanged any words; all he remembered about her in later life was her name, Alice White.

Frankel: A bit like Dante and Beatrice.

Frizell: And then, of course, there was the other person whom he met in Paris many, many years later, when he was in his early forties. She was Mrs. John Jacob Astor. Santayana wrote to a friend that he was infatuated with her: here was a perfectly charming woman. At the end of the letter he noted that she had invited him to dinner; but he was some small distance away, and he wrote to his friend that he was not so young and foolish as to spend a day and a half riding on a train merely to have the pleasure of sitting beside a woman for one hour, no matter how beautiful or how charming she might be.

Bryson: Of course, I would detect a certain amount of—what shall I say?—disguised timidity in that episode. But the rest of it all seems to fit. Maybe that's the way one *does* achieve the most complete depth of compassion for human affairs—not to have any of one's own. You're a philosopher, Mr. Frankel: what about that?

Frankel: You're catching me here. That goes pretty far; I don't know, but I do think it was essential for Santayana. Bertrand Russell says someplace that a certain amount of disengagement in place and in time is necessary for all the best work. There are very few moralists who have been as lively, emotionally, as Santayana and at the same time as disengaged. And I would say that for his kind of thing it was absolutely essential.

Frizell: This is very curious, because here was a man who lived to the age of eighty-eight, and I imagine that at the age of forty—less than halfway through this very long life—he clearly recognized that he was going to be happier in his middle and old age than he was as a youth. As he once told a young man: "Your shoe pinches you and you're wracked by insufferable and unaccomplishable desires. When all this is through, of course, life will be a lot more pleasant."

Bryson: I suppose that's the basic philosophic position. It may be the reason why philosophers have always fought for detachment. But it's surprising that this man who is, as you say, as much moralist as philosopher still thought of that as the ideal existence—the exist-

ence of the observer. Is that the reason why we think of him as *not* American? He was not anything.

Frankel: No, he was a citizen of the world in the genuine sense.

Bryson: Almost a *non*-citizen of the world.

Frankel: One of the volumes in his autobiography is called *My Host the World*. He was a visitor in the world.

Frizell: And his tone of voice was oracular rather than argumentative.

Bryson: In some ways, I suppose, it's all to our benefit and profit that he was never a citizen of any particular country, because he might have been a second-rate poet instead of a first-rate philosopher if he'd been committed.

WALLACE STEVENS

Collected Poems

(As broadcast December 11, 1955)

JOHN CIARDI

• ALFRED KAZIN •

LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: Stevens was read only by the few throughout most of his life, but he had an enormous reputation of the kind that one sometimes calls an "underground" reputation. I think one reason for this, at least in my reading of him, is that the common reader—even though he may be a lover of poetry—finds him difficult. Stevens doesn't seem to care about those aspects of reality which are in the minds of most people as they start to read.

Kazin: The trouble is that the surface of his poetry is marvelous, rich, and strange—so much so, in fact, that people perhaps get discouraged by the seeming proliferation of colors.

Bryson: In which there is no very evident pattern at first glance.

Kazin: No, but like anything good he's worth repeating, worth reading over and over again, worth studying. If you do—and we have many helps in our age—I think that something emerges which is very fine and very beautiful; more than that, it offers a genuine key to some of the standing riddles and predicaments of our period. Let me try to put it this way: I think that Stevens has very bravely, in his own mind, faced the problem of the poet living in a world in which science has cleared away the poets. He seems to have said to himself: "The world, they say, is so and so; but I see the world as such and such, and I'll portray it as such." That is, through the imagination, through what you can only call the poet's love for reality as he sees it. He constantly dispels the false shapes, the seemingly discouraging pictures that the world of theory gives us—the world

in which the gods are dead and the sun has gone out and all the rest of it. He shows us the world as one that is rich and strange.

Giardi: I think that Stevens is not really difficult, once the reader has discovered what it is he's saying. It's always essentially one thing. It can be illustrated over and over again: the world imagined is the ultimate good.

Bryson: It is that other world.

Giardi: And very often Stevens is persuaded of a kind of reality that seems to be the opposite of what the world accepts. For example, he says: "I taste at the root of the tongue the unreal of that which is real." I don't see any serious difficulty, once that inversion of reality is found. Some of the forms do give me difficulty, but it's a pleasurable difficulty, like listening to music and not quite knowing what order is being evolved, though sensing that one is there. I found in reading Stevens again that many of the poems that had once seemed difficult suddenly opened up and made themselves. I believe others will open up under further reading, and I'm sure that I know what their themes will be.

Kazin: But the problem of opening the poems up demands, I think, some clarification; it's a very real one. Here's a poet who creates works of imagination. He sees the world in a new light, which is the radiant light of his own imagination. He sees it in certain colors, which are his own colors. When we talk about him or when we read him, we translate all this into our kind of words—and then we try to translate it back into Stevens. The whole problem is to see it in his terms.

Bryson: I don't think one has to do that.

Giardi: That's the problem of all poetry: how do you keep a man from reading you in his own image?

Kazin: Well, we can't do it entirely. But one way of beginning is to insist upon the authenticity of imagination itself. I think we can't possibly slip wholly into his mind, and therefore we won't be able to read him entirely. But what we can do from the very beginning is to insist that Stevens is not simply a creator of disturbing, puzzling surfaces. He's a philosophical poet who's talking about something that's terribly real, perhaps the most real probable that man can face in our kind of world: how shall we say this world belongs to us? How can we reclaim it for ourselves? This is the problem of the poet. I put it just now in a very un-Stevenslike way, if you like. But the fact remains that whether it's Proust talking about the other world which dictates all our ideas, whether it's any poet, whether it's any imagination that insists upon a knowledge which it cannot prove but which it feels it has, we still begin by asserting, even in the teeth of science, the fact that the imagination is a faculty which does make reality radiant.

Bryson: I will for the moment impersonate a person having difficulty—with some sincerity. It's not that I want to translate Stevens' wonderful words into prosaic and stupid words of my own, and then, having got this meaning, translate them back. Not at all. It's that I honestly want to know exactly what these sparkling patterns

of words mean, what they signify to Stevens. I want to know what he's trying to communicate.

Ciardi: I think you can have that answered very directly, and in one sentence: the world imagined is the ultimate good. Let's put it down in terms of a specific poem, because, as a teacher of undergraduates, I'm somewhat pessimistic about the general ability to read what a symbol means. Here's a very simple poem of Stevens, called *Anecdote of the Jar*. And I can see many ways in which the unwilling or unprepared reader could go astray in this very simple poem: "I placed a jar in Tennessee." Well, obviously the jar is a *made* thing; Tennessee is an *unmade* thing—the "slovenly wilderness." Many readers refuse to see Tennessee simply as a symbol. They insist on seeing the actual Tennessee:

*I placed a jar in Tennessee,
And round it was, upon a hill.
It made the slovenly wilderness
Surround that hill.*

*The wilderness rose up to it,
And sprawled around, no longer wild.
The jar was round upon the ground
And tall and of a port in air.*

*It took dominion everywhere.
The jar was gray and bare.
It did not give of bird or bush,
Like nothing else in Tennessee.*

Like nothing else in the natural world, if you want this in impoverished paraphrase. The shape of the made thing gives ardor and significance to the unmade, the natural. Now this is not a theme to which many readers are very ready to respond sympathetically, but it's an unmistakable theme if one will surrender to the poet's way of handling it.

Bryson: You used two words, Mr. Ciardi, that interested me. You said the "unwilling" or "unprepared" reader. It raises a problem which you as a teacher face all the time, and so does Mr. Kazin. How much and what kind of preparation should a person have in order to grasp this poem?

Ciardi: The necessary preparation is suppleness of the imagination; my favorite phrase for it is to "as if" the imagination . . .

Bryson: That means experience with other poets?

Ciardi: Yes, it means experience with something beyond nuts and bolts.

Bryson: It doesn't mean a study of footnotes?

Ciardi: Absolutely not. It's a sense, a feeling; it's a . . .

Kazin: A state.

Ciardi: Yes, a state.

Bryson: Well, then, one gets to this state of receptivity and willingness, which seems to me to be quite clearly required for this

kind of poem—although you have made it clear and significant—by a previous experience of the same kind. One must immerse oneself.

Ciardi: That's one of the problems, of course. Nobody is born with enough experience to get to be a human being in a hurry.

Bryson: But we do it somehow.

Ciardi: Not everybody.

Bryson: No, but there's an astonishingly large number of human beings among the population of the world, Mr. Ciardi. How do they learn?

Ciardi: I think by taking into their minds fragments of the minds of other human beings.

Kazin: But there is something else we have to mention, and it's very shocking to say: I think people resist the imagination because it makes them happy. They don't want to be happy.

Bryson: You're probably right.

Kazin: I think two faculties are involved. There is what I would call intellectualizing, which is the sad sack of doubt. If Stevens gives us a beautiful poem, my first reaction is: uh-huh, what is he trying to get away with? There is another faculty that I would call a "state of grace" in this conception, and it's the state in which we enter into another man's quality. Why? It makes us happy. And joy, I believe, in poetry is too intense, too round, too full. It opens up too many hypothetical collisions with the world of quote Reality unquote to allow us to persist in it.

Bryson: Some resist it?

Kazin: Not resist—but the boy in class always says "All this is very nice in here, but what about when I go outside?"

Bryson: Well, what *about* the boy outside? Doesn't he read it with more pleasure outside than he does in class?

Kazin: No. What he's worried about is enjoying himself in class; he feels that the outside world will be too much for him. It will say to him: do you think you can be happy very long in our kind of world? To which Stevens would say: here's a poem—read it and be happy.

Bryson: The people who tell him he won't be happy in the outside world are mostly the poets themselves.

Kazin: Oh, no, no!

Ciardi: I keep telling my students that no one has time enough in one lifetime to learn by himself everything he needs to know to be a human being. He has to learn it from others. We have to learn from Shakespeare, from Dante, and from Homer what the possibilities of the human mind are. We have to enlarge ourselves, just as the chemist has to learn what the history of chemistry has been before he can begin to do anything on his own. We have to make contacts with other minds. Stevens has made very extensive contacts with other minds. He's supple in this company, and we have to go along not step by step but with some of his same motion. It takes effort, but it's joyous effort.

Kazin: And it takes courage, too. For example, from one of his most famous and I think most beautiful poems, *Sunday Morning*,

we have this vision on a Sunday morning of someone who gives up a hope of paradise which is no longer sincerely felt; who remains in the home with the green rug, the parrot, the oranges, the lovely colors of the real, natural world. In such a world, Stevens says, one has visions of what comes from *us*. That's what he's getting at, again and again—that we create this world in which we live as much as it is given to us. And this, of course, is the romantic faith which for two or three centuries has sustained men in trusting their own imagination. Now here, for example:

*Supple and turbulent, a ring of men
Shall chant in orgy on a summer morn
Their boisterous devotion to the sun,
Not as a god, but as a god might be,
Naked among them, like a savage source.
Their chant shall be a chant of paradise,
Out of their blood, returning to the sky;
And in their chant shall enter, voice by voice,
The windy lake wherein their lord delights,
The trees, like serafim, and echoing hills,
That choir among themselves long afterward.
They shall know well the heavenly fellowship
Of men that perish and of summer morn.
And whence they came and whither they shall go
The dew upon their feet shall manifest.*

And that kind of acceptance of death, of the fact that men perish under the blaze and glory of a summer morn, seems to me to be a joy enough for a couple of lifetimes.

Bryson: It's very beautiful, Mr. Kazin, but when you read that to a boy in the full flush of his youth, does it release him?

Kazin: No, but one can't always speak from the reader's point of view, for a very simple reason.

Bryson: I wonder if you speak from both?

Kazin: No, I think the problem is to *know* a kind of excellence; it's not always to ask how we shall know it.

Bryson: Of course it's to know a kind of excellence. But isn't there some responsibility on the part of the poet to communicate this vision? To make it accessible to somebody?

Ciardi: Once it has been made real, it is accessible to those who will prepare themselves for this kind of reality.

Bryson: I'm willing to accept the responsibility of the reader. But I'm also trying to defend the readers who find Stevens difficult, because I have some sympathy with them. Some of them feel—and both of you are sure it's wrong—some of them feel that he doesn't really care whether this trapped reality is accessible to anyone but himself.

Ciardi: It is accessible. You may have to climb higher than you wish in order to get there, you may have to take pains that you're not willing to take, but once the thing has been made real in a human imagination it can be achieved, if one cares. If one doesn't care, why bother with salesmanship?

Kazin: And it's more than that. The fact is that what is communicable is only that which is real to begin with in the poet's mind.

Bryson: That's my impression.

Kazin: A novelist creates a living character not by trying to give you homey little touches, which can be sold across the vaudeville stage, but by *feeling* that the character will be entirely alive. And we have this strange mystery of human communication where what is untrue breaks down and no longer is shared between reader and writer, but what is truly and radiantly felt by the writer comes through to the reader as such. Well, now, in these poems the question is not merely one of communication but of the actuality of the thing. Stevens, after all, began as a seemingly difficult, *recherché* poet; he was a poet's poet, a pure poet. The fact remains that in one way or another we've seen in the last few years an amazing devotion to his work on the part of people who perhaps twenty years ago would have been frightened by it. Why? Because what was real to him is now communicated to them. I admit that it takes time—and Stevens himself, fortunately, was not in a hurry; but then no real writer is. What counts in the end is only the authenticity of what is said and felt, and I think that the question of communication is badly put if you think of it always in terms of writer-to-reader; it's more the writer's saying "Is that the way I really feel it?" Then, somehow, someday, it will come through to the reader.

Ciardi: Emily Dickinson used to ask herself "Have I said it true?" Not "Have I communicated it?"; not "Have I got it across?"; but "Have I said it true?"

Bryson: But neither did she say "Have I *felt* it true?" She said "Have I *said* it true?" Let me drop this disguise of being a person who doesn't understand Stevens . . .

Kazin: Come out from behind your mask, Mr. Bryson!

Bryson: Although I wouldn't claim that I understand him fully, I certainly get a great deal out of reading him. It seems to me that Stevens may perhaps gain in the long run from the fact that he has disregarded what you gentlemen so derogatorily call "salesmanship"—from the fact that he did just try to get it said in his own terms. I don't think that he was merely working within the confines of his own life; I think he did have the feeling that this thing—once captured, once ordered, and once said—was there for everybody, didn't he?

Kazin: Yes, except that he wasn't thinking of everybody. You see, a poet does have an object in his mind: he's trying to reach a certain standard of truth. But, after all, the whole point of poetry is that what the poet sees is a very lonely kind of vision at first. He sees it—nobody else may, but he really sees it—and if he does see it, so it comes through. One person says "Give me another kind of word, that word is too difficult." But the poet begins by seeing the world in that color, in that word, and no other will do. The fact that it cannot be broken up, cannot be translated into basic English, is what makes it poetry. Well, here's one of his most charming and, I think, funny poems, *Peter Quince at the Clavier*. It's a poem about the

delights, the sheer sensual delights, of love and water, and it's all based on a fairly naughty interpretation of the story of Susanna and the Elders from the Apocrypha. I won't read it all, but just look at the beginning:

*In the green water, clear and warm,
Susanna lay.*

*She searched
The touch of springs,
And found
Concealed imaginings.
She sighed
For so much melody.*

*Upon the bank she stood
In the cool
Of spent emotions.
She felt among the leaves,
The dew
Of old devotions.*

*She walked upon the grass,
Still quavering.
The winds were like her maids,
On timid feet,
Fetching her woven scarves,
Yet wavering . . .*

Hemingway used to say that there was a solid gold bar of feeling which the writer trusts, and Stevens does trust himself.

*Soon, with a noise like tambourines,
Came her attendant Byzantines.*

*They wondered why Susanna cried
Against the elders by her side:*

*And as they whispered, the refrain
Was like a willow swept by rain . . .*

All this brings back something which I think is quite remarkable. We haven't said enough here, surely, about the extraordinary sonorousness of Stevens's verse—the way these words sound out, the actual musical effects, like an enormous orchestra.

Giardi: He takes great pleasure in words for their own sake. I can't think of a better example than the beginning of *Bantams in Pine-Woods*, where he's saying, actually, "This is a bantam rooster with a pedigree, and the name in the pedigree book is Chieftan Iffucan of Azcan." He rolls this on his tongue and just loves it, and he salutes him in a mock-heroic way:

*Chieftan Iffucan of Azcan in caftan
Of tan with henna hackles, halt!*

Well, what I'm getting at is that we have to pay some attention to Stevens's love of play for its own sake, his fine luxuriating in sound and objects. Also, a point not sufficiently stressed is that for Stevens the world is a thing made in a poem.

Kazin: Yes.

Giardi: The poem is not a description, it's a thing; it follows from itself. And I like this passage from *Certain Phenomena of Sound*, which catches this very important quality of Stevens's work. He is sitting on the lawn of his house and someone has returned from a journey:

*So you're home again, Redwood Roamer, and ready
To feast . . . Slice the mango, Naaman, and dress it*

That's luxuriating, you see.

*With white wine, sugar and lime juice. Then bring it,
After we've drunk the Moselle, to the thickest shade*

*Of the garden. We must prepare to hear the Roamer's
Story . . . The sound of that slick sonata,*

*Finding its way from the house, makes music seem
To be a nature, a place in which itself*

Is that which produces everything else . . .

And this is really Stevens's poetry, "a place in which itself is that which produces everything else."

Kazin: Very often the poet starts from the fact that the classical mythologies are dead for us. This, I think, is what a poet must do; he restores to us the same kind of legendary joy in the spring-time of the world which the classical gods once portrayed. For example, in *The Paltry Nude Starts on a Spring Voyage* his point of departure is Botticelli's very famous picture of Venus on a seashell. Now we all know, of course, that since the Greeks no one has taken any fun in nakedness or any pleasure in the senses. But he says:

*But not on a shell, she starts,
Archaic, for the sea.
But on the first-found weed
She scuds the glitters,
Noiselessly, like one more wave.*

*She too is discontent
And would have purple stuff upon her arms,
Tired of the salty harbors,
Eager for the brine and bellowing
Of the high interiors of the sea . . .*

He goes on in these wonderfully quick and subtle words to describe how she moves "across the spick torrent, ceaselessly, upon her ir-retrievable way." When I read this poem for the first time, I suddenly realized that the words which one takes so much for granted are all quite wonderful in themselves. I think one of the real definitions of this kind of work is that when you look back, you must say to yourself: "But how was it made?" You can't find out, at least not easily.

Giardi: I'll answer the Stevens way:

*Alas, have all the barbers lived in vain,
That not one curl in nature has survived?*

This is a theme of Yeats, too—the necessity for artifice.

Bryson: Do you feel that there is a certain lack of urgency, of passionate urgency, in all this loveliness?

Giardi: I can't believe that. I think every breath that Stevens took was taken against his awareness that someday he was going to stop breathing, and that's urgency enough.

Kazin: Well, that's the mortal state. All I meant was that we mustn't be content simply to understand and to admire modern poetry, but also to measure it against the history of poetry, to measure it against what poets have done in the past. But let us not forget that at the very end Stevens not only makes his poem clear to the man who will read him faithfully, but he also celebrates the world in which we live; he brings us back to it in every possible way.

Bryson: If we understand him at all, it is with his help. I suspect that it's too soon to reappraise a man who is so immediately expressive of something in our time.

RUTH BENEDICT

Patterns of Culture

(As broadcast December 18, 1955)

• SOLON T. KIMBALL

• MARGARET MEAD

• LYMAN BRYSON

Bryson: In reappraising books of the last twenty-five or thirty years, it's surprising that only one dealing with scientific material came to mind. I suppose that one did not only because of its great scientific importance, but because it is a book firmly established in the popular literature of the time.

Mead: This was the book that introduced the American public to anthropology in the mid-thirties, and interestingly enough it's still the book that's introducing them to it twenty-one years later.

Bryson: Nothing has taken its place?

Mead: Nothing. It has gone into paperbacks, of course, and to such an extent that we've got two different paperback copies here on the table.

Bryson: And I understand that it's sold many tens of thousands of copies. What did you mean when you said it introduced the public to anthropology?

Mead: It's the book that people give to anyone who says, "I'd like to learn something about anthropology." You'd give it to an intelligent physicist or chemist or political scientist or . . .

Bryson: Or a housewife!

Mead: Or a housewife; any intelligent lay person, that is. It's what we give our undergraduates, and what we give our graduate students. It's the first book in interdisciplinary courses that are sup-

posed to put everything in the world together; it's the book in American libraries abroad; it's been translated into all sorts of languages. When people ask "What is anthropology, what are its basic ideas?", this is the book.

Kimball: I think one should add that this book made a very real contribution to anthropology itself.

Bryson: It became an introduction for the layman *and* it had its own contribution to make?

Kimball: Yes, indeed. When this book first appeared we had behind us a quarter-century of development in anthropology. Dr. Benedict, with the materials in this book, was able to summarize and give a focus to some of the developing ideas in anthropology.

Bryson: Well, now, you two have put a pretty heavy burden on a little book that you can pick up and slip into your pocket. What did she do in this book? What is the kind of anthropology she introduces?

Mead: She called it the science of custom, to begin with. That is, she introduced us to the idea that there is such a thing as human culture—the shared learning of a people, which is unique within their tradition and is all learned. So that it had the result of making all men members of the human race, because all had learned a culture.

Bryson: Perhaps she destroyed the idea of Culture with a big C that Matthew Arnold had left us with a hundred years before. Culture was something special, but she made it something of the most general.

Mead: It's the very stuff of life, which everybody has and everybody lives within. The Eskimo has it, the ancient Egyptians had it, and so do the people of New York. These are their ancestors' materials, you see. Nowadays everybody uses the word "culture" all the time; they say "our culture makes us do this" or "in our culture we can't do that." "Culture" in this sense was an unknown word until the late twenties.

Kimball: She does more than that, too. One of the things she has done is to call attention to the fact that different peoples in different cultures have always felt themselves to be the Chosen People.

Bryson: Which they all do!

Kimball: We all do. In doing this I think she perhaps pursued a moral purpose, in the sense that she shows how anthropology, and the study of peoples throughout the world, brings to all of us an understanding of the *we*-ness that we feel about ourselves.

Bryson: Making us doubt it?

Kimball: Yes, it makes us doubt it.

Bryson: Makes us doubt our assumed superiority?

Kimball: That's right. It permits us to see that other peoples and other times, as well as ourselves, have claimed superiority for their way of life and for their ways of doing things. This book appeared at a time when impetus was being given to ideas of racial superiority. Dr. Benedict's book was a very important antidote to the racist theories that were then current.

Mead: We used to think that the word "pattern," the sense of a

configuration that exists in each historical culture, was difficult to translate. But Dewey discovered that the thing that's difficult for some countries to translate is the "s" in patterns. They haven't any idea that there can be many patterns of culture; to them, there is only one pattern and they have it. That's particularly true in some parts of Europe still today.

Bryson: When you say translate, do you mean that the book has had a worldwide circulation?

Mead: Just exactly that. It plays the same role in other countries that it does in this country.

Bryson: Well, if she has accomplished the task of introducing the layman to anthropology and has made a contribution to cultural theories at the same time, it seems to me that it ought to be possible to state in not too lengthy compass just what this theory is. Is there a theory of culture as she states it?

Kimball: I think one of the things that she emphasizes—and it is of the utmost importance—is that cultures are more than a sum of their traits. They constitute integrations. There's a sense of *wholeness* that she developed and expounded. She was, as it were, counteracting the kind of animistic thinking about the world which had been prevalent up to that time.

Bryson: You've got to explain that, Mr. Kimball. What do you mean by a sense of wholeness? The wholeness of what?

Kimball: Ways of behaving and thinking, backgrounds, motives—how all of these are woven into patterns.

Bryson: If you're a Mexican you behave by a Mexican *pattern*, and not just according to a catalog of Mexican peculiarities?

Kimball: Yes, there is a Mexican pattern which hangs together. The different parts of it have a relation to each other; in order to understand any part of it, you must understand its relation to the whole.

Mead: In this book she discusses the fact that each society has its shared, learned behavior, most of which was borrowed from somewhere else—but then we interpret it and give it its Mexican-ness or its Eskimanness after it has been used by people through all time.

Bryson: Does Dr. Benedict mean by wholeness that there are in the world quite a number of these sets of traits, which, whatever their origin, do hang together, do interpenetrate, do interfuse? So that if you live as a Mexican, you're not living partly as an American and partly as a European and partly as an Indian and partly as a Spaniard; you're living as a *Mexican*, which is a thing in itself, distinct and individual?

Mead: Yes, even though you eat Indian corn, which was distributed over this continent long before the Europeans came; you sit on a chair of a type that was introduced by Europeans; you may be a good Catholic and go to church, but your child may still have an old Indian name. Each one of these traits is shared with different people in a different part of the world, but when a Mexican sits at a table to eat his corn or says his prayers or marries his wife, every detail carries with it a Mexicanness.

Kimball: This is what she means when she talks about the diversity of cultures. And she also talks about the choices among the total elements and entities that go into a culture.

Bryson: Do you mean choices that each culture offers the people who live in it, or choices among the cultures of the world?

Mead: You don't mean either, do you?

Bryson: Well, then, I misunderstood you. Go ahead.

Kimball: Dr. Benedict was talking about the range of cultures, the variety, the endless panorama of the different ways in which people, in different parts of the world, solve problems. Her final emphasis, though, was on the intermingling of the entities that go to make up the whole.

Mead: In one place the funeral customs will be tied up with wealth, in another place they will be related to simple human grief, in still another place they may be an occasion for epic poetry contests. And the reason I broke in when you started rephrasing, Mr. Bryson . . .

Bryson: I wanted to know who was making these choices.

Mead: I know you did. Ruth Benedict says, for instance, that the human being can make every single sound known in any language—and more, if you'll listen to a baby. There's a period when a baby can do everything: bushman clicks and glottal stops and the most difficult diphthongs—everything on earth. But suddenly, one day, you'll notice that the baby narrows down. It narrows down to sounds that will be the basis of its own particular language; the other sounds become difficult and strange and have to be learned as another system.

Bryson: And this is an analogue of all the other traits; it suddenly finds it difficult to walk in certain ways . . .

Mead: Or to skip.

Kimball: I wonder if I might quote, very briefly, what Dr. Benedict says: "What has happened in the great art styles, happens also in cultures as a whole. All the miscellaneous behavior directed toward getting a living, mating, warring, and worshiping the gods is made over into consistent patterns in accordance with unconscious canons of choice that develop within the culture."

Bryson: And didn't she indicate that these cultures are of equal validity—that as you look at the pattern by which some other human being outside your nation or society lives, you must accept the pattern by which the other fellow lives as valid in its own right?

Kimball: Yes, she made this statement.

Bryson: Rather leaving you with the idea that she thought one was as good as another.

Kimball: Yes, she states it very explicitly; she speaks of the new bases for tolerance, the coexistent and equally valid patterns of life which mankind has created for itself from the raw materials of existence.

Bryson: That's what you meant by saying the book "had a moral."

Kimball: I think so.

Bryson: Now what about the cultures she actually takes as her examples?

Mead: She takes three: two American Indian cultures and one Melanesian, from the southwest Pacific. In order to describe these cultures in ways that will make them intelligible to the literate Western educated person, she draws on a variety of labels that come out of our own society. To describe the contrasts between the pueblo-dwelling Zuni and the warlike plains Indians around them, she used the word Apollonian. She gives us a picture of these Indians who always approve of the middle way, who always disapprove intensity, who have a tendency to regard anyone with any intensity as a witch.

Bryson: These middle-way Indians are the Pueblos.

Mead: These are the Pueblos. And the same institutions that, all around them, were used by other tribes as occasions of ecstasy and excitement—such as the sun dance where people dragged the muscles out right out of their chests to show their religious excitement—turn up here in different form. In Zuni even alcohol wasn't accepted, as it was in other societies, because they were never interested in excess or in intensity of any sort. She builds up this contrast. Her second culture is a group of Indians up on Vancouver Island called the Kwakiutl, who took the social organization of the Indians north of them and the individualism of the Indians south of them and made a new combination of them. They spent their lives in violent, megalomaniac—and there she drew on the terminology of abnormal psychology—exultation of themselves by giving away property and, in the end, by the destruction of property. Each great climax of life came when you had destroyed more property than anyone else.

Kimball: This part of Ruth Benedict's contribution has never been fully developed, but I think maybe today it's beginning to come into its own. Particularly in the work which you, Dr. Mead, and some others have done in the area of national character structure—because, in a sense, this was a sort of beginning of connotative description of cultures.

Bryson: There's one more culture we haven't talked about. First you had this contrast, in the south, between the Indians who sought ecstasy and those who avoided it, and then those Indians up in the north who sought excitement in expensive destruction. The remaining culture was that of . . .

Mead: The Dobuans, who were sorcerers.

Bryson: Off New Guinea.

Mead: The Zuni description was based on her own fieldwork, the Kwakiutl on that of Professor Boas, and the Dobuan on Reo Fortune's *Sorcerers of Dobu*. The Dobuans are a group of people whose social behavior is very close to what we call paranoid. Everybody believes that everybody else is stealing his wife, stealing his yams, making him sick; every woman sits over her cook-pot every minute, keeping other people from poisoning it; people sit up all night recit-

ing chants to steal other people's yams and to keep their own yams from being stolen.

Bryson: About as uncomfortable a civilization as I ever read about.

Mead: A miserable and uncomfortable civilization.

Bryson: But you'd think it would have raised questions in Dr. Benedict's mind as to whether all cultures are equally valid. You have just described a culture that you'd think would be intolerable to any normal person, but she always insists that anybody born in any culture is normal. You learn to be a fearful, frightened, sorcerer-haunted person if you are born among the Dobuans, or you learn to be a placid lover of ceremony and peace if you're born among the Zuni's—and yet you are the same person.

Mead: You were originally the same person.

Bryson: Yes, except for your luck in being born in a different culture. Does that sound as if all cultures were equally valid?

Mead: This is the problem: by "valid" she meant worthy of being treated as something that belongs to human beings, a framework that human beings had built and worked on and reared their children within. It's the kind of validity that you mean when you say "every human being is valuable." Now when we compare a beggar and a great statesman or scientist, we're not saying that they're equally bright or equally socially useful or equally contributing in any way, but that they are equally valid as human beings.

Kimball: I think that distinction is one that has to be made here, because in the latter part of the book she refers to the Puritan culture of New England, and there she points out that the kind of behavior which gained greatest social approval among the divines of the early colonial world would not be approved today.

Bryson: Even in Boston.

Kimball: As she says very explicitly, persons who exhibited this kind of behavior today would find themselves patients in mental institutions. In the culture of that time and that place, perhaps this kind of behavior was valid—but that doesn't necessarily mean that it should be approved or that we should give it high ranking.

Bryson: But she does have some idea that cultures have a kind of validity in their, well, "integration"—that is, if they hang together in a certain way, if they give people ideals which it is possible for them in some measure to live up to.

Mead: She makes the point that some cultures are much more integrated than others, that you can't expect integration of every culture any more than you expect a coherent taste from every human being or a coherent art style from every period in history. When they're highly integrated, they show the pattern most beautifully—and so she picked the most integrated cultures to discuss. Many cultures are not integrated in the same way at all, but they are human; they're what a group of people have made; they're what they've lived by, reared their children by, and died by. They've perpetuated themselves. So I don't think that the degree of integration is a measure of validity.

Bryson: Some cultures that don't achieve a complete integration

of pattern might be better than some that do, because the latter might follow a bad pattern. Isn't it true that in her later work—particularly in that wonderful explanation of Japanese culture that helped us so much in our policy toward Japan, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*—she changed a bit in her ideas?

Mead: I think that in working with Japan—and this happened to all of us during the war—we got the most vivid experience we ever had of a culture that was highly civilized, highly complex, and highly integrated, but extraordinarily cruel to its members. If she were living today, I think she'd be interested in the ways of judging which cultures are most flexible, most able to change, and best for the people that live in them—as well as how we can create leverage within cultures like the Japanese that are too rigid.

Kimball: This, I think, was one of her great contributions—that in the course of her life there was this growing awareness of the kinds of problems and the kinds of solutions she was dealing with, and in particular the growing awareness of perception. It seems to me in that what she has done for all of us is to give us new perceptive ways of looking at human beings and looking at cultures.

Bryson: And doing it in the most persuasive way, so that all you have to do is to read the book.

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